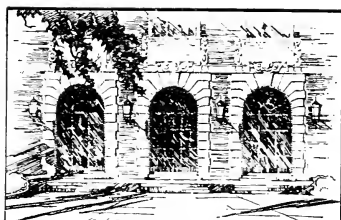




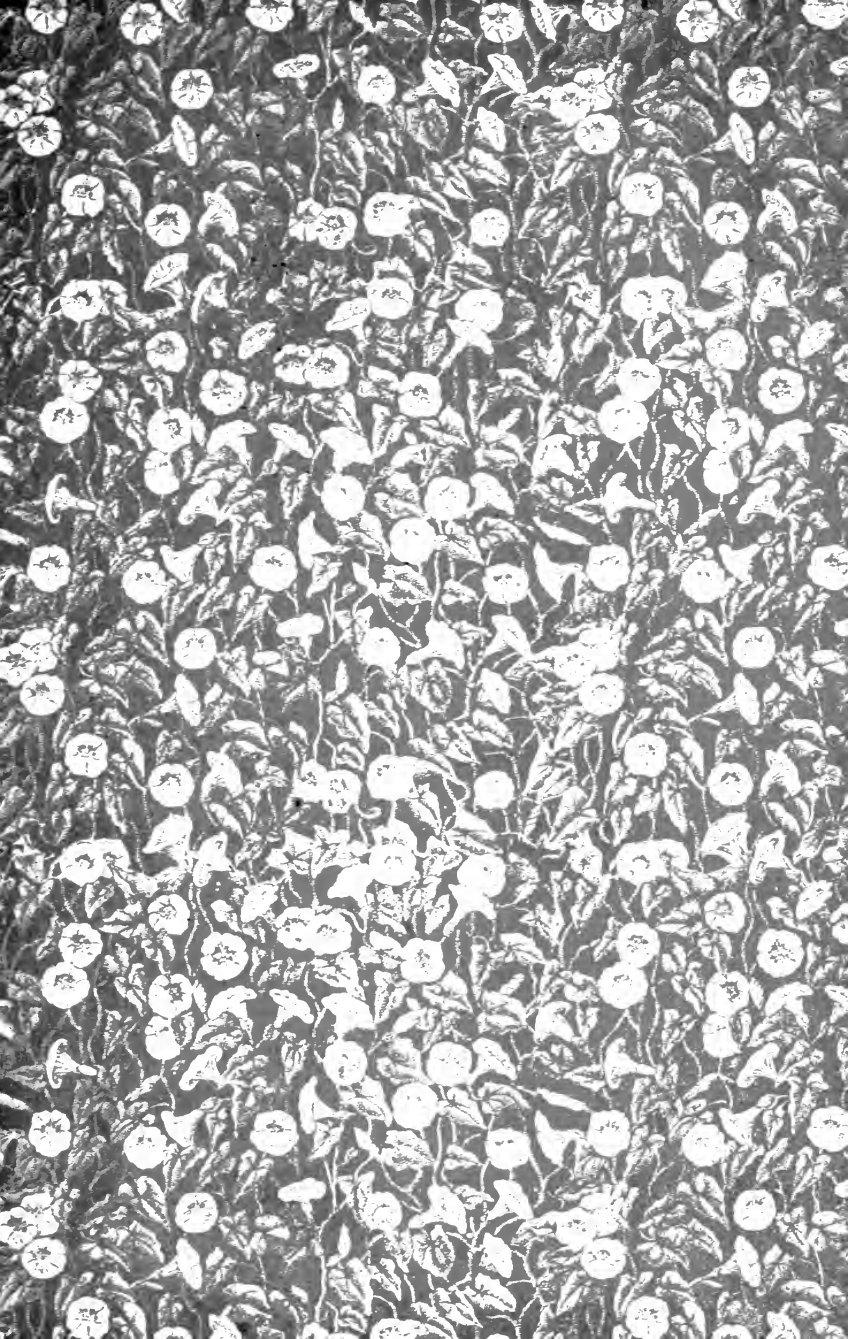
ALSTON CRUCIS

HELEN SHIPTON



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ALSTON CRUCIS.

VOL. II.



# ALSTON CRUCIS

BY

HELEN SHIPTON

AUTHOR OF

'DAGMAR,' 'THE LAST OF THE FENWICKES,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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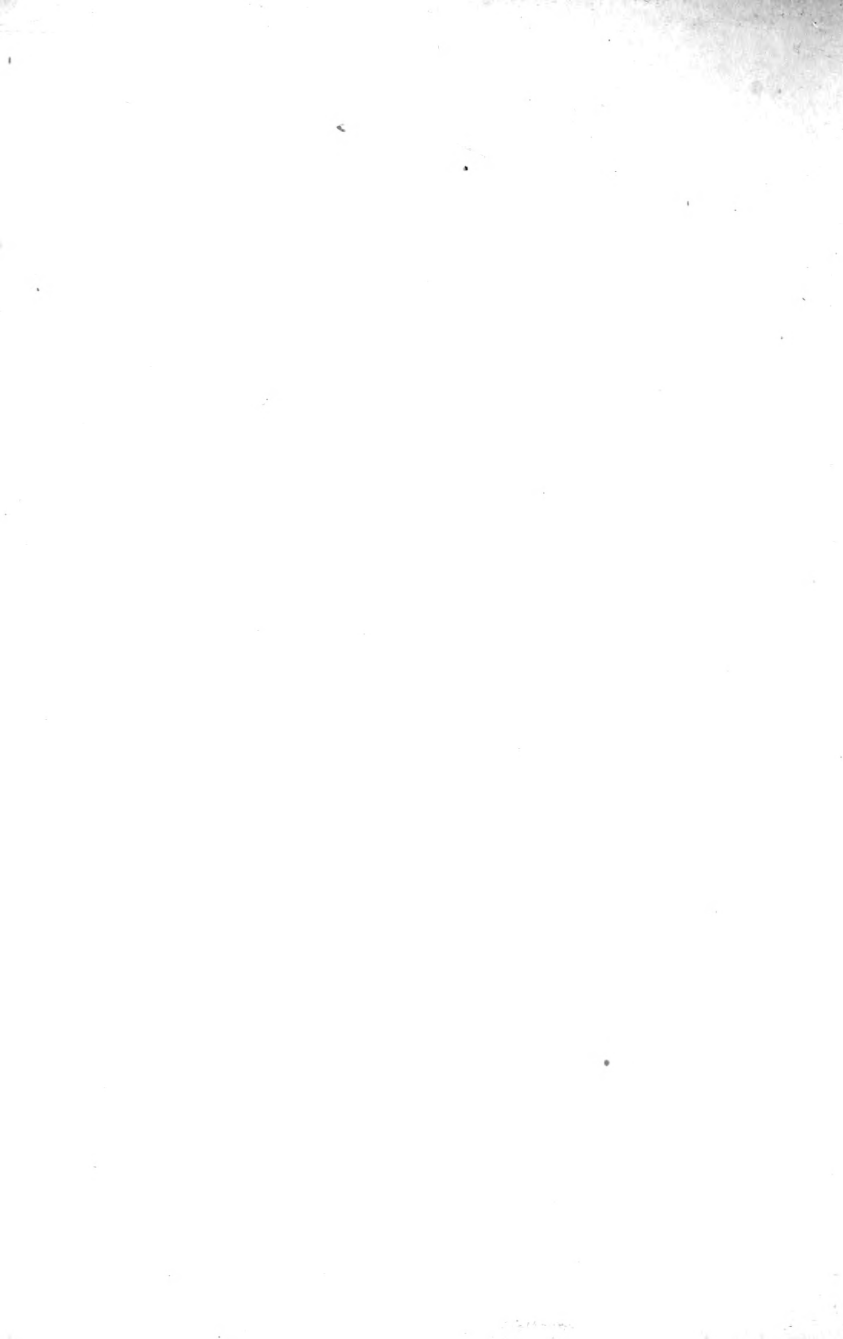


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OF  
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# ALSTON CRUCIS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### OVER THE LIBRARY FIRE.

Is all our fire of shipwreck wood,  
Oak and pine?  
—Well! poor sailors took their chance,  
—I take mine!

*James Lee's Wife.*

IN four days Harold came back, and told the old granddame how he had sped. He had disposed of Joe Herne with the old keeper on Thansley Moor—a place where his relations were not likely to seek him out, even if they happened to hear of his being there.

And he had found Will Herne, by the help of his old acquaintance, Mr. Walrond's James ; and had heard from him a tale that was, in all important respects, the same as Joe's. Will had, it appeared, had a kind of quarrel with his former master, Thornton Harris—perhaps finding him less amenable to threats than the man-servant had hoped and expected, when he became accessory after the fact to a deed that somewhat irked his conscience.

He had been afraid to move in the matter by himself, but now declared his willingness to tell his story anywhere, and before anyone whom it might concern.

But Harold was plainly not satisfied. He let the old woman extract so much, by repeated questionings, but could not or would not say what he intended to do next. Perhaps he had misgivings of which

he did not care to speak. Granted that this story was true, what could he do with two witnesses—both manifestly open to bribery—against a man in Harris's position?

And, if Squire Philip had known of this, why had he kept that strange silence which, in this new light, looked stranger than ever? And what were those papers which Joe Herne had brought back to him, and which he had welcomed, the gipsy said, as if they had been drops of his heart's blood?

Secretly Harold had interviewed his grandmother, and secretly he departed again, taking a bundle with him. And, in a few hours, he reappeared in the garb of civilisation, and made his entry by the front door instead of the back; seeming, indeed, in a somewhat saturnine mood for one who had been spending a week with

friends, but quite ready to attend to the requests of his man of business, who had been getting somewhat out of patience.

Phil was equally delighted and surprised when his step-brother appeared at dinner, in his usual inconsequent fashion, as if he had never been away. But he soon found that Harold had very little to tell him, and did not seem willing to talk about his wanderings.

‘I had guessed who did it, before; and now I know,’ he said, when they found themselves alone together in the library after dinner. ‘But as for proving it to anyone else—that is another matter! I would rather not talk about it yet, even to you. Here’s Curtice coming, so be off, there’s a dear lad; and, as soon as there’s anything worth hearing, you shall know.’

Mr. Curtice had not, perhaps, a very

high opinion of his young employer's intellectual powers, though Harold had surprised him once or twice by showing unexpected comprehension of some matter to which he had seemed to be paying only half attention. But he had known him all his life, and his father before him; and, being himself a discreet and honest man, had contrived to steer a comparatively even course among the rocks and shoals of the Malreward temper. He had been talking confidentially in the drawing-room to the Misses Malreward and their sister-in-law, and receiving their suggestions as to something they wished Harold to do; but when Mr. Curtice came into the library, and saw the dark, inflexible face that the young squire bent over his work, he very judiciously held his tongue, and attended solely to the matter in hand, which appeared

to require less explanation than usual.

When at last he rose to take leave, Harold detained him.

‘Do you know,’ he asked, with boyish abruptness, ‘of any particular place where my father was in the habit of keeping papers—important papers, I mean, that he might wish no one to see?’

‘There was his secretaire,’ answered the lawyer, inwardly marvelling a little. ‘And the strong-box in the wall here—and the tin safe at my office.’

‘Did he give you anything, to keep for him, between the time of Mr. Crofton’s murder and his own death?’

‘Yes.’

‘What was it?’

‘A paper relating to Mrs. Malreward’s marriage-settlement. You have seen it.’

‘You know of no other place, then?’

Thank you, that is all. Good-night.'

Left alone, Harold proceeded to search the receptacles that the lawyer had mentioned, and every other place he could think of; but with little hope of ultimate success.

In the course of attending to necessary business, they had both been through all these before, since Mr. Malreward's death, and had come across nothing that was likely to have been in Crofton's possession at that time, or that would answer to the description that Will Herne had given of what he had seen. 'A lady's name was in them, two or three times,' he had said, 'and one, at least, was a letter.'

Of course it was possible that they had been destroyed; but some words that the dying lips had striven hard to utter came

back to Harold now with a new light upon them.

Just at the last his father had seemed to change his mind about something, to contemplate the discovering of something that hitherto he had been resolved at all costs to hide.

‘—Some papers—’ those failing lips had said. ‘I dared not burn them. There is a note left with them,—You will find,—and do what is right——’

‘Where shall I find them?’ Harold had asked, half mechanically, dazed with trouble; and had got for sole answer a murmur of words that he could not distinguish, listen as heedfully as he might.

Late that night he was still looking, and searching in vain; and when at last he went to bed, it was to dream of secret drawers and hidden panels, and all the



contrivances for hiding important documents that his scanty reading of novels could suggest to him.

All the next morning he searched again ; but languidly, because there was really no fresh place in which to look ; and after lunch found himself nervously taking down the books from the well-filled book-shelves, and glancing behind them as if he expected to find what he was looking for there.

‘This is folly!’ he said to himself, sharply, at last. ‘My father was no fool. If he had anything of importance put down in black and white, he would not have left it where a servant might find it. And, if he wanted me to look to anything, it’s plain he must have left it where he thought I should come across it. I’ll hunt no more ; until I can think of some sensible and

likely place where I have not looked already !'

And with that he ordered his horse, and rode off to see his lady-love ; and, if possible, get rid of the faint chill that their last brief meeting had left.

This meeting was not altogether satisfactory ; for some of the brothers' friends and Harold's own old acquaintance were there, and declined to be driven away ; so that he got none of the private conversation that he desired. But there was a something in the young lady's manner that flattered and pleased him, he hardly knew why.

The fact was that he himself was more of a man than he had been a fortnight before, and Miss Colvin's perceptions were quite keen and delicate enough to make her aware of the fact, and instruct her how to recognise it.

But not even Alicia's beauty and his own honest love could long make Harold forget his perplexities, and he came back to them long before his own door opened to receive him.

He had left Netherfold early, as soon as Miss Colvin retired and the usual evening card-playing began; so there were lights in the drawing-room when he reached Crucis, and the ladies were still there, though Phil was gone to bed. Very often Harold had as little to say to them as they to him, and preferred to sit by himself in the library, with tobacco for an excuse. But to-night the library seemed to reproach him with the discovery that still eluded him, and he came into the drawing-room and even tried to make conversation, an effort to which his step-mother and his younger aunt responded readily enough.

Those winter days were terribly dull at Crucis now, and Harold had at any rate had a glimpse lately of the outer world, though he did not seem inclined to give much account of it.

But Miss Malreward—‘Aunt Laura’—sat by in silence, and Harold watched her, in the pauses of the unexciting conversation, and was struck, as he had never been before, with the self-contained and sensible look of a face that hitherto had been too familiar to make any impression on him.

His father, he remembered, had confided in her as much as he did in anyone—which was not much—far more than in his wife or his younger sister. Could it be possible that she could help him? that she might know of some place where her brother would have been likely to keep

such papers? Hardly likely, Harold decided within himself, and yet the idea haunted him—all the more because no other ideas on the subject could be invoked that night.

He had not forgotten it the next morning; but instead of acting upon it he went upstairs and ventured—feeling himself a sacrilegious intruder—into the room that had been left in silent state ever since the day of Squire Philip's funeral. Here, or in the dressing-room, there were but few places where papers could have been kept; but such as they were Harold searched them all, and ransacked the two rooms afterwards, thinking of secret doors and sliding panels. There were such things at Crucis, though not just there; but they were too well known for the dead man to have trusted his secret to their keeping.

The morning went by in these vain investigations; and soon after lunch Mr. Walrond and his daughter made their promised call.

Harold's aunts were not on the spot when the visitors arrived, being in fact in the act of paying their daily visit of ceremony to their mother in her own domain. When they came in, and their greetings distracted Mr. Walrond's attention, Harold first dared to permit himself a significant glance at Elizabeth, and met her eyes, brimful of interest and mirth.

‘I have got home, you see,’ he said, in an undertone, drawing her a little apart.

‘I am very glad to see it!’ she answered. ‘I felt responsible. In fact, I persuaded my father to come over to-day that we might see——’

‘Thanks! But I can never thank you

properly. How quick you were—and ingenious, too. Was there much sensation the next morning?’

A little ripple of laughter startled the unaccustomed echoes of the gloomy old drawing-room, as Elizabeth suddenly recalled some remarks of her father’s, at which she had not dared to laugh at the time.

‘Pretty well. But I got my key back before any domestic cataclysm took place, as I suppose you intended. Thank you, too, for guessing so correctly and managing so well.’

‘That was nothing. It was so bright I was sure it was in constant use, and I was bound to see that you had it again when you wanted it.’

‘And your arm?’

‘Nearly healed. There was so little

damage done that it was practically cured when your father stopped the bleeding.'

'And—other things? Did you find what you wanted?'

She looked at him with a touch of grave interest that somehow revealed to Harold that she was older than he had thought—older and more beautiful. But his face clouded over a little.

'I have, and I have not,' he said; 'and it's a long story. Some day, if you have not forgotten all about it by then, I will tell you the whole story, with the sequel, which may prove to be the most important part.'

There was no time for more private words. Mr. Walrond was looking round for his daughter, that he might show Mrs. Malreward what his 'little girl' had grown into; and in a moment or two



Phil came in, shy but friendly, and attached himself to his new acquaintance.

They went out into the garden presently, and her light feet traced the mazes of the wonderful yew-hedge, and paused beneath the brown immemorial arches that pierced it here and there. Phil beguiled her away along the sunny terrace walks to look at the wonderful little garden-house and play-room that he had hardly yet outgrown ; and her laugh came ringing back upon the still air of the mild winter's day with a note as sweet as a robin's.

That girlish laugh, that flitting girlish form, gave the quaint walled garden a charm that it had never had before in its young owner's eyes, and he sighed to think that Alicia had never been in it, and that it might be long before her stately beauty found its fittest setting there. But

Miss Colvin's lover had never heard her laugh aloud like that, and never would. Her laugh was not so pretty as her smile, and she knew it, and had acted upon the knowledge ever since she came to womanhood.

That night, after dinner, Harold detained his elder aunt by a look as she was leaving the room.

‘Can I speak to you by yourself, in the library?’ he asked; and Miss Malreward agreed, with less surprise than he had somehow expected.

He put to her the same question that he had put to the lawyer, and she paused an instant before replying, looking at him with keen questioning eyes, not unlike his father's.

‘Has anyone told you anything that

makes you ask *me* that?' she said at last.

'No; but I believe there are some papers that my father meant at the last that I should see. And I cannot find them.'

Again she paused, with a frown of intense consideration, while he waited, wondering.

'I suppose I ought to give them to you. I suppose this was what he meant. If not, I hope he knows that I mean to do what he wished, as far as I can guess.'

There were tears in Miss Malreward's eyes as she rose and left the room: a sight so rare that it increased her nephew's wonder and bewilderment. In a few minutes she was back again, carrying a large sealed envelope in her hand.

'Your father gave me this the day

before he died,' she said. 'And first he made me promise never, under any circumstances, to open it myself or allow anyone but you to open it. Then his mind seemed to wander, or at any rate I fancied so at the time. "I can't make up my mind whether to tell Harry," he said; and then he said something that I could hardly hear, about dying silent, and that if the wrong was his doing the punishment would be his. I waited for a minute, and then asked him what I was to do with the packet, then, and he roused himself and spoke clearly. "If Harry asks for it," he said,—"if I say anything to him, or if anyone else tells him, and he asks for it,—let him have it. But if not, keep it safe; and before you die see it safely burnt and out of the way, as you will answer to me when we meet at the Great Day." So I pro-

mised him, and that was the last word that ever I had from him.'

The dead man's sister was weeping as she ended, and the dead man's son held out a hand that trembled a little, and took the packet from hers. It seemed to both that they gave, and took, a message from the dead. And then Aunt Laura, without one curious glance, rose and left the room; and her nephew locked the door after her, and sat down before the writing-table and let his fingers play round the seal.

He was afraid, as everyone is of the utterly unknown. But he knew that he was afraid, and presently the knowledge stung him into action, and he broke the seal.

There were perhaps half-a-dozen different papers in the envelope, but enclosing them all was a letter, a long letter on thin, lined

paper, in Philip Malreward's handwriting. And his son understood that he was meant to read this first.

The date was three months back, and it ran as follows :—

‘ MY VERY DEAR SON HAROLD,

‘ I write to you what I dare not tell you,—and half intend, even while I write, that you shall never see this. I have tried to live an honest man, but for your sake I have half determined to die a rogue . . . . But I sometimes think lately that I have not long to live, and I might change my mind at the last, and have no opportunity of telling you all. There are others, too, who might tell you, and their statement ought not to stand without mine.

‘ And, above all, the whole thing may

be a lie, and you may live to prove it so. God grant, if it is so, that I may know it, wherever I am. But, meanwhile, the fear that it is true is breaking my heart . . . . Harold, my son, I must tell this tale as plainly as I can, and what I may feel of shame and regret you must understand without words. I am too heartsick to complain or protest—if I begin that, I shall break down.

‘You never heard me speak much of your mother; you were not old enough to remember what she was like, and I had never the courage to begin to tell you what we had both lost. But I must tell you now that I knew nothing of her life before she married me. I loved her, and I will swear that she was more than worthy of my love. But she was not willing to speak of the past, and I would not press her; so I

knew no more than that. I met her first as a young widow, staying with Samuel Crofton, soon after he married your aunt. He seemed not altogether pleased that I should marry her, and the quarrel that has separated us for all your lifetime began when, soon after our marriage, he attempted to blacken my wife's character to me. Thank heaven, I never for one instant believed him! He could not touch the happiness of those two short years we spent together.

‘ You know what my business relations with Crofton have been; how, ever since you came of age, he has persecuted me to get possession of Benson's farm. His reason for wanting the land, rather than his money, I never knew. But certainly he had one, for he was as long-headed as the devil his master.



‘ The night after I had paid, and Harris had received, the amount due to the firm, Crofton came over here in a fury. He tried to persuade me that payment had been made too late, the interest being in arrears—as you know—and notice having been given of their intention to foreclose. It was all over and done with, he said, and the land was his, and Harris ought not to have received the money, which he offered to give back to me then and there. When he found that I refused to believe him, or to give up the quittance that Harris had signed on behalf of the firm, he offered to buy the farm for a larger sum than I had just repaid him. It was fully more than the land would have been worth in open market, but I told him plainly that I wished to have no dealings with him, and that we had sold the Shropshire property simply

that we might not have to break our fence here.

‘ Then he swore that since I would not sell he would make me glad to *give*, and he brought out what you will find with this.

‘ Copies, you will understand. The originals, he told me, were safe in the hands of his partner.

‘ Harry, I cannot bring myself to write about this. You will see it for yourself, and understand.

‘ You have never known how much I loved you. I never let you guess how much you were to me. And now, reading this, you have a right to curse me for the carelessness that has ruined your life—if this tale is true. If ever you can bring yourself to say, “ He loved me, after all, and I forgive him,” I think I shall know it, even in my grave.

‘I am losing my head and my nerve with all this. I have begun making inquiries, and dare not go on with them ; and, though sometimes I hope that Crofton lied, I am never in the same mind for long together.

‘*Then* I was confident enough. I took Crofton by the throat, and nearly shook the life out of him. I flung his “proofs” back to him, and told him that he was slandering the dead as he had tried to slander the living. Your mother’s face rose up before me, Harry, and it seemed an insult to her not to dare him to do his worst. I did it, and then I thrust him out of the house. In his blind anger, I suppose, he took my whip and left his own behind. You will find his in the third drawer of my *escritoire*. It has been there ever since, and I have never spoken of it to anybody.

‘ Very soon after he was gone, my courage began to fail. At least, I had misgivings ; I began to see how the worst part of it might be true, and yet your mother have been ignorant and blameless. I wished that I had read the documents more carefully, or that I had kept them. I opened the window and listened, wondering if Crofton had really gone, past calling back. I even went out, with a confused idea of following him, and coming to some clearer understanding. That was hopeless, of course ; and even if I had seen him again my pride would not have let me suggest a compromise then. I wandered about confusedly in the dark, thinking of many things, and of you most of all. But before nine o’clock I came back to the house, and locked myself in here. As it happened, it was well for me that more than one of the

servants saw me come in ; but, of course, I thought nothing of that at the time. What I did that night I cannot tell, but by morning I had half resolved to see Crofton again, and try at any rate to discuss the matter with him peaceably. And while I was thinking of it Joe Herne found me and told me that Crofton was dead, and that Harris had killed him. If ever you read this—and I fear some day you must read it—you must seek out Joe Herne and hear the details at first hand from him. Horrible as the story was, I could not but believe it, especially as he brought back to me the papers that Crofton had carried away with him . . . The originals are with Harris, and the first time we met I knew by his eyes that he had read them. He said not a word to me on the subject, nor I to him, but he knew that I knew

that he was guilty, and that I dared not speak.

‘ We have been silent ever since, watching each other, both afraid to move, except that I have made inquiries as far as I could without risk of discovery, and he has cautiously thrown suspicion of the murder upon me. He is a clever man, even cleverer than Crofton, and he has faith in those proofs of Crofton’s, or he would not dare to drive me to the wall like this.

‘ They have all turned against me, Bolingbroke and all of them. If I die now, they will say that shame and the fear of discovery broke my heart. But I swear I would not lift a finger to clear my name, to-day. If they can all believe that of me, what does it matter ! My heart is broken, I think; but it is this that has broken it—the fear of what I might myself discover,

the shame that you must share with me.'

The letter, and the paper on which it was written, came to an end together here. Whether there had ever been any more of it, or whether the writer had broken down at that point and never taken up the task again, there was nothing to show.

Harold read the letter through, slowly, but without a pause. If any had been there to watch, they would have seen nothing but deep thought and keen attention in his dark face. If he was afraid, he would not show it, even to himself. If he was moved—well, the time might come when certain sentences in that letter would draw the slow tears to his eyes, but not yet. He laid it down and took up the other papers. There were but five of them, not one of any length ; and he read them

through—some twice, some three times—comparing one with another, and weighing every sentence. The last dropped from his hand, and he sat motionless; looking straight before him with bright but expressionless eyes—oddly like those of some beautiful savage creature, newly-trapped, that betwixt anger and terror will not stir.

For more than an hour he sat there, and did not move a finger: and of what he was thinking he never knew himself, far less could he tell to anyone. There was but one thing in the world to think of, and that was a huge storm-cloud that filled his brain and could take no recognisable shape.

What roused him at last was the storm without—a gust of wind that howled against the wide oriel window, and dashed handfuls of rain-drops against the small



leaded panes. The dreary sound made Harold shiver without knowing why: and then he found out that he was cold to the very heart; so cold that for the moment he could think of nothing else. The sight of the papers lying before him startled him as if he had not known that they were there, and he gathered them hastily up and flung them into the correspondence box on the table and locked it. Then he swung his chair round to the fire, and cowered over it, breaking up the live coals, and holding out his hands to the blaze.

It was a fairly good fire, even for the generous ideas of that part of the world; but in a moment more Harold rang the bell for more fuel, and, having roused himself again to unlock the door, astonished the old butler by ordering him to build it half-way up the chimney. He eyed his

young master at intervals as he obeyed, and presently said,

‘Aren’t you well, Mr. Harold? I beg your pardon, sir.’

‘No!—Yes!—I’m cold, that’s all.’

‘You must have had a chill, sir. Shall I get you a drop of brandy?’

Harold laughed a little grimly.

‘Better not,’ he said, half to himself: then aloud—‘No, thanks! I’m not fond of the stuff, as you know. I won’t take to it—yet!’

‘God forbid you ever should be fond of it, Mr. Harold. But a little is useful at times; and you look as though a drop would be good for you now.’

Harold made no answer. He was bending over the fire again, watching the flames as they crept up between the fresh dry logs. And the old man, who had been at

Crucis all his life, knew better than to press a suggestion, but retired discreetly.

It was not the cold of that luxurious room—the finest remnant of the old abbey, the pride of Alston Crucis,—that had crept into Harold's bones. It was the cold of the winter woods, where the ragged gipsy tents could hardly keep out the driving sleet and rain—

‘ When the rotting woodland drips  
And the leaf is stamped in clay.’

Here the burnished steel laughed back the laughing flames, and quaint faces in the coloured tiles round the hearth alternately gleamed out and disappeared. But, even from here, velvet curtain and thick oaken shutter could not banish the wail of the houseless wind. And out yonder, by the gipsies' fire, the rain hissed in the half-extinguished embers, and the gale

shrieked through the leafless trees. No wonder Harold was cold, with half his soul wandering out there in that dim region—beyond and behind the world of civilisation—which he knew at least too well to have any illusions concerning it.

This story, if it were true, meant nothing less than ruin—utter and irretrievable! There would be nothing left—not even a name. He had seen that from the first, but he only began to comprehend it now as he crouched over the fire, and by degrees the mere physical comfort helped him to get over the shock that for the moment had chilled his heart and numbed his brain. And, by the time he began to feel warm again, the natural reaction had begun. It must be a lie! It was impossible that it could be true; though his

father had believed in it, and had died of the belief; though a clever scoundrel like Thornton Harris believed in it sufficiently to dare a halter on the strength of the weapon it gave him. It must be *made* a lie—practically. There are facts that should never be recognised, hideous anomalies that should never be acted upon; and this, if it were a fact at all, was one of these. If ever there was a secret that the grave ought to cover, it was this.

‘The grave shall cover it!’ said Harold to himself. ‘Father! you should have died silent, as you said! But *I* can hold my tongue. Harris knows, and I have made an enemy of him; but he will not strike unless I strike first . . . Suppose it were true, what then? What is abstract right in such a case as this? . . . Phil would not thank me—he cares for me a good deal

more than he would like to step into my shoes. And no man is bound to ruin himself and take away his dead mother's good name . . . So that was why that arch-villain warned me not to stir muddy water. I am obliged to him, and if he lets me alone he shall go unchanged to his grave—for me !'

Though it might seem that Harold had taken his resolution, it was late that night before he left the library. In the wide echoing hall he paused a moment beside the shaded night-lamp that had been left for him, and listened, as if the secret that he had locked up behind him there might have escaped and be wandering through the silent house, whispering itself into every sleeper's ear.

The great folding doors opposite were

partly open, and beyond them he could see the broad oak staircase, with its shallow steps, a little warped and sunken with age, and its ponderous balustrade. Above the first landing was a stained window, which a faint thread of moonlight was just beginning to touch into a dim jewel-like radiance. There was something new and strange to-night in the familiar homely stateliness of the scene, as if he had been away for years and had half forgotten it. And Harold stood and looked at it all with a new interest, though with a face nearly as impassive as that marble face of the first Harold Malreward that from the over-mantel seemed to peer stonily over his shoulder.

Leave all this, to which every fibre of his frame seemed to cling, and go out into the world, an outcast among outcasts? Not while the secret lay in his own keep-

ing, within the grasp of hands that would not tremble or relax ! Not while the only other man who knew it was constrained to go softly—with a halter perpetually hanging over his head by way of inducement to keep a still tongue !



## CHAPTER II.

## CHECK BY DISCOVERY.

‘ And what will ye do with your towers and your hall,  
 That were sae fair to see, O ?’  
 ‘ I’ll let them stand till they down fall,  
 For here never mair maun I be, O !’

*The Ballad of Edward.*

MISS COLVIN was surprised, and not altogether pleased, when the very next day Harold presented himself again at Netherfold, and was shown in without any of those formalities—such as inquiring first for her brothers—upon which she had laid some stress. If he had something to tell

her, she thought, some proposal to make, he might stand excused. But apparently he had not; and, when reminded that he had been there only the day before, he answered, abstractedly, 'Was I?' and evidently was thinking of something else. Indeed, yesterday seemed to Harold half a lifetime ago, and it never occurred to him that he could be blamed for coming again 'so soon.'

Alicia did not want to quarrel with him, however; and, since there seemed no other way of rousing him to a sense of his enormities, she said no more. And she was rewarded, as patience is apt to be, by a conversation much more to her mind than mere lover's rhapsodies. The young master of Crucis spoke of their marriage as of a thing in the immediate future, and consulted her as to various alterations that

must be made in the old house, the kind of carriage that she would prefer, and other matters which to Alicia meant a great deal. It seemed to her that she had never seen him so reasonable, and so like other people. But his eyes did not smile, even when his lips did ; and when the lips were not smiling they settled into a curve that was new to them—a curve something more than resolute. Alicia was not fanciful, but glancing at her lover once, when he had plainly for the moment forgotten her very existence, she admitted to herself that if he was not so foolishly fond of her she might grow afraid of him.

Nevertheless, the visit on the whole was satisfactory to her, and she even condescended to admit as much to her brother Spencer, when he came in after Harold's departure.

‘More than you had any business to expect, then,’ said Spencer, with brotherly frankness. ‘Why didn’t you let him make the engagement public weeks ago?’

‘As it happens, the reason that I gave you and him was the true one,’ answered Alicia, coolly. ‘If the engagement was to last long he might very probably have grown tired of it, and I did not choose to give him the chance.’

‘He would have felt it binding, though, and you would have been sure of him.’

‘What would have been the good of that? Do you think I would have him if he were not perfectly willing and anxious to have me? There must always be complications and disagreeables when a man in his position marries a woman in mine. Am I so absolutely without other resources that it would be worth my while to drag him against his will through them all?’

‘What do you mean by other resources?’ asked her brother, with a grin. ‘Young Cavenham, and the steel works? There is more money there than at Crucis; and they say he is going into Parliament, and means to be somebody.’

‘Personally, I like Harold much better,’ she answered, quietly; ‘and the position would be pleasanter,—if it were in another county. As it is, it might take me all my life to make these people forget who we were.’

Meanwhile, if Harold, riding home alone with down-bent head and lips compressed, wore a look of extra resolution, it was chiefly outside show. He thought that he had made up his mind, and had, indeed, gone to see Alicia because a vague consciousness warned him that her influence would be thrown into the same scale; that the very sight of her would strengthen his

resolve. But the battle was not over yet. An older resolve was still fighting desperately for existence, and bringing up continually reinforcements of old aspirations and tender memories—hardest of all enemies to subdue. Even the sight of the turning to Deerhurst sufficed to renew the conflict, when for the moment it had been crushed down and extinguished.

‘I can never go there again!’ said Harold to himself, bitterly enough. ‘I could clear my father now, and I dare not!—I will not!—but I can never look Mr. Walrond in the face, or his daughter either. They would despise me if they knew; and quite right, too!’

Surely never was a fixed resolve so tossed about! But the only present result was that Harold arrived at home in a mood of bitter ill-temper; in a rage with himself

and everything else ; and sat at the foot of the dinner-table with so lowering a face that no one dare speak to him. Perhaps his step-mother and aunts, watching him with veiled glances, were wondering what was the matter ; but they were far from expecting the announcement with which he presently electrified them, barely waiting until the servants had left the room.

A wild impulse had seized him to say something that would help to fix his resolution ; something even that would startle those three quiet women out of the calm propriety that seemed to irritate his fretted nerves unendurably. He spoke, knowing that he was losing his head in the turmoil of that unending battle going on within, and could not fairly estimate consequences.

‘I am thinking of being married!’ he said, abruptly. ‘I thought I ought to

tell you, though the time is not absolutely fixed.'

If he meant to make a sensation he had certainly succeeded, though his hearers were too well-bred to make a scene. To all three women this announcement meant that it would be necessary for them to seek a new home ; and though Mrs. Philip Malreward might, before this, have contemplated the possibility of retiring to a house of her own, yet she had not thought of it as an immediate necessity. And, as for her sisters-in-law, they had never known any other home than Alston Crucis.

It was Aunt Laura who spoke first, recalling her scattered wits, and speaking with a certain quiet dignity :

' This is—very unexpected. But I hope—we all hope—that it may be for your happiness. Who is the lady, Harold ?'



‘Miss Colvin, of Netherfold.’

‘Indeed? I have heard the name, I think, but we have none of us met her. She has two brothers, I believe. Is that all the family?’

‘Yes.’

It was Mrs. Philip who had spoken last ; and Harold knew what the words implied, but he said no more.

‘Is she nice-looking?’ asked Miss Margaret.

‘She is generally considered very beautiful. I have never seen anyone so beautiful.’

Judging by the calm conviction of his tone, they could not suppose that he was in the least ashamed of his choice. But he looked strangely gloomy over it. And Miss Malreward sighed, remembering how her brother, Harold’s father, had brought

home for a bride no one knew who, and from no one knew where.

‘Well!’ she said again, ‘I am sure we all wish you joy. And you say you do not think of being married just yet?’

‘Not till my father’s grave is a little greener, for decency’s sake!’ said Harold, with an odd break and jar in his voice. ‘Thank you, Aunt Laura. If some of you will go and call upon my future wife, it will be the proper thing, I suppose?’

‘We will call, as soon as we are going out again,’ said Miss Malreward; and she rose and left the table, while the others were glad to follow her, that, in the drawing-room, they might talk out their half-dismayed amazement. And Phil went with them, but not to the drawing-room to talk the matter over. He had his own views

as to what made his half-brother so gloomy, and he had something to say to him, when he could make opportunity to say it.

Harold sat long enough over his untasted wine, revolving what he had just said, and still aware of that battle going on between heart and brain. He had not gained much by the last move, for he had told his astounding piece of news in such a way that he did not even believe it himself! It did not seem to him that he was going to be married, and to bring a beautiful bride home to Alston Crucis. He felt much more as if he were going to be ruined, and going out to fight the world single-handed, with scanty prospect of even bread-and-cheese for one. And yet, was he a fool?—or could anything but utter and inconceivable folly on his part

bring that about? He sprang up, and went into the library to look for a fresh set of thoughts in place of those that were growing unbearable. And there, by the fire, sat Phil, evidently waiting for him.

‘I want to speak to you,’ began the boy, and hesitated a little, for his stepbrother did not look very approachable.

‘Go on!’ said Harold, flinging himself into the big chair. ‘I’m in a black, bad temper, but not with you. Say away.’

‘I know there’s something wrong,’ said Phil, soberly. ‘And I suppose it’s about this business of father’s. You said you would tell me when there was anything to tell, but I wish you would tell me if it has stuck fast, and why.’

‘It has stuck fast,’ answered his brother, in a curious, unemotional voice. ‘But I can’t tell you why.’

‘Uncle Bolingbroke was here this afternoon,’ went on Phil, with apparent irrelevance.

‘Ah! And I suppose he was talking about our disgrace.’

‘He would know better than to do so before me, I should hope! But I was reading “Guy Mannering” in the corner, and mother was talking to him about this and the other old frump who ought to have called and hadn’t. And she was crying, and he shook his head, and said that, under the circumstances, we must expect it, and so forth—till I wanted so badly to tell him what you were doing to set things right. But I thought I mustn’t. And then I was reading how “No plea gangs on well without siller.” And I wondered whether that was standing in our way now—want of money, I mean?

Uncle Bolingbroke was saying that father did not leave you much ready-money. But I shall have some; and if I could sign a *post obit*, or something of that sort, couldn't we get hold of it now and use it to pay people to find out—offer a reward or something?'

'A *post obit* doesn't seem a very hopeful suggestion,' said Harold, with an unmirthful smile. 'Should you be willing to spend your fortune to clear our father's name?'

'Yes! as long as there was enough left for mother,' said Phil, quietly. 'I'd rather break stones on the road, or beg for a living, than see people look as they do—even as Uncle Bolingbroke did this afternoon—when his name is mentioned.'

'I don't think you know what you are talking about!' answered Harold, after a minute, very coldly. 'It is easy enough

to say such things, but quite another matter when it comes to practice. And you have no idea what hard work means, or beggary either.'

Phil was sensitive where Harold was concerned, and, at the unwonted tone, the tears sprang to his eyes. He did not choose to let them be seen, however, and only got up, after a moment, and quietly left the room. And Harold started from his seat, and paced up and down, in a dumb rage that was gradually leaving outside matters and concentrating its sting against himself.

There was something in his nature of the inarticulateness of savage races. If there had been some one there who possessed his full confidence, he would still have had nothing to say. But the chill of the night before had given place to a sort

of fever of impatience, in which it seemed as if the walls stifled him. He drew back the curtains and opened the shutters, and looked out into the night. It was wild, but moonlight, and the hurrying clouds and beckoning, leafless branches tempted him. He opened the abbot's door, and went out into the park by the very way his father had gone on that memorable night, now more than a year ago—the night of Crofton's death.

A fine grass avenue, with shrubs grouped about the stems of the larger trees, came down almost to the wall of the house on this side; and Harold walked slowly up it, over the short, wintry grass, in the moonlight, and under the thin, spectral shadows of the wintry boughs. To the gate at the head of the avenue he came, and looked out over the valley, with the twinkling



lights of Alston St. Denis on the opposite hillside. Then slowly back again, as perhaps Squire Philip walked that night,— ‘ thinking of many things, and of you most of all.’ And it seemed to Harold that the dead man walked by his side all the way, with silent lips and mournful, upbraiding eyes.

Perhaps he was not without his fair share of a certain kind of courage ; for this haunting vision, terrible as it was to him, drove him to face it, not to attempt to escape from it. It drove him presently back into the house, into the very inmost citadel of his fears and memories ; the room where he had seen his father die, and where the ghostly moonlight lay across the unruffled couch, on which no one had lain since.

He sat down, with half-averted head, in the very chair beside the bed where he had

sat then; and deliberately recalled what he had been trying, for the last twenty-four hours, to put away from his mind:—the long sad weeks while the strong man's heart was slowly breaking, the sad days when even Death's dark shadow could not blot out the thin, cold shade of disgrace. Some words, spoken in the last of those days, came back to him very easily—he had repeated them to himself so often.

‘There has been a great wrong done,—you must set it right, for my sake, that I may lie quiet in my grave. Swear to me that you will look to it, and set it right.’

But they came back to him now with a new light upon their meaning. It was not the wrong to himself of which Squire Philip had been thinking, it was the wrong done to Phil. It was Phil who was being

robbed and cheated, while one who should be a nameless outcast held his rights and his place.

For the moment a keen pang of jealousy made itself felt, through and beyond what might have seemed more pressing troubles. Harold had always somehow been aware that his father loved him best; which was perhaps one reason why he himself had always found it easy to be fond of his little half-brother. And now it seemed that it was Phil their father was thinking of as he lay dying; Phil's interests that were nearest to his heart.

For that one instant it seemed to Harold that his father was lost to him indeed,—twice lost! The next,—the resolve that so many memories had undermined fell, suddenly, into nothingness.

‘He did love me best!’ cried the young

man, half-aloud, standing up by his father's death-bed, in the still moon-lit chamber. 'He knew that I was his own son, after all; that I would see right done, and without whining over the cost. And, so help me God, I will!'

Miles Bolingbroke, Esquire, of Ashleigh Manor, had not perhaps been very well pleased when his sister, an heiress and considered good-looking, elected to marry Philip Malreward. If she had done it when it was first talked about, when they were both younger, it would have been a very different matter. But in the meantime he had slighted his old friends to marry a woman of whom no one knew anything; and had got an heir to his estates—thus relegating the children of his second marriage to a secondary position,

which Mr. Bolingbroke did not desire for connections of his own.

Perhaps one of Philip Malreward's chief motives in marrying Alice Bolingbroke had been the desire to link himself and his boy more closely with old friends and neighbours. And to a certain extent he succeeded, but not where his brother-in-law was concerned. Mr. Bolingbroke was civil, as became a connection; but they never went back to the friendship of their youth.

Indeed, Miles Bolingbroke was one of those dull, tenacious people who are very slow to forget an offence, or to forgive anything that puzzles them or that seems beyond the scope of ordinary rules. He had been fond of Philip when they were boys, but his friend's marriage was a shock that he never got over; and later,

when he saw the handsome, gipsy-looking lad, the son of the nameless woman, riding beside his father through the country lanes, it never failed to remind him of that old beldame in the chimney corner at Crucis, and of the taint that she had brought into the Malreward blood—which might account equally for Harold's dark complexion, and his father's eccentricities.

All the same, Mr. Bolingbroke had been most unwilling to believe his sister's husband guilty of robbery and murder. He would probably never have believed it, but that he had called upon his brother-in-law and solicited a confidence that had been utterly refused him. Squire Philip would not explain, would not justify himself, would not give any reason even for his strange silence. And Mr. Bolingbroke, who had had some legal training,

and supposed himself to have much legal acumen, took to weighing evidence, and found the evidence *per contra* of overwhelming force.

To all, except blind unreasoning faith and confidence like Harold's, it was plain that Mr. Malreward's sole defence was in the *alibi* proved by the Bensons and by his servants. But Mr. Bolingbroke thought that he had his own reasons for not believing the Bensons' testimony. So, after having offered his assistance in tracing the real murderer and finding the offer coldly refused, he came to the conclusion that he could no longer honestly befriend his brother-in-law, though still hoping, for his sister's sake, that he would not come to be hanged.

He felt, perhaps, a little thankful to the delinquent for dying quietly in his bed,

and thus saving himself from justice and the family from more disgrace. And this feeling intensified his desire to do right by Harold and help him, as far as possible, to live down his father's shame.

But Mr. Bolingbroke's offered kindness had been flung back in his face, as we have heard, and perhaps the reason was not so evident to him as it had been to Harold.

He felt as much resentment as a right-minded man could permit himself to feel against a fatherless lad no older than his own sons; and resolved to leave Harold severely alone for the future.

He had believed the resolve to be mutual, and was the more surprised when, one wild January morning, 'Mr. Malreward' was announced, and shown into the room where he sat, pretending to ascertain



the future prospects of the country by the help of his favourite paper.

Mr. Bolingbroke was not an ill-natured man, and he suffered from a nervous shyness which he was in the habit of concealing by an air of even greater cordiality than he felt. He laughed nervously, as he rose to greet Harold, and laughed again even more nervously when the young man bowed gravely and did not seem to see his offered hand. He enquired after Harold's health as if they had parted amicably only the day before, and even tried to drag the conversation to the chances of hunting during the ensuing week, so afraid was he of silence, and still more afraid of the grave intent that he saw in the young man's face.

Harold let him talk himself out, almost without reply, looking away from him

with sombre, unresponsive eyes. Then, turning suddenly, plunged into his own business.

‘You are surprised to see me here,’ he said. ‘But not more surprised than I am myself. I come to you because you have been against my father, and therefore as a gentleman are most bound to take up his cause—when you have been shown good reason for doing so.’

Mr. Bolingbroke opened his somewhat rabbit-shaped mouth to speak, but Harold lifted his hand.

‘One moment! I am not blaming you. It is not worth while now—now that you will be undeceived so soon. And I have come to you because you will be against *me*, naturally, when you know all, and so will not side with the devils who have been tempting me, all this night long, to hold my tongue.’

He paused a minute, feeling in his breast-pocket for something, while his hearer looked more than puzzled, almost vacant, not being in a position to form any idea whatever as to his meaning.

‘I give you these, but don’t look at them yet,’ went on Harold, handing to him a long sealed envelope. ‘There is an explanation that you must hear first. Thornton Harris killed Sam Crofton, his partner, and my father knew it. The night before his death Crofton showed my father those papers, and told him that the originals were in Harris’s keeping. Now! read them in the order in which I have marked them, and tell me what you think of my father’s silence under the false accusation, and of my position now.’

Half mechanically Mr. Bolingbroke broke the seal, then paused, looking at Harold.

‘This is a very new idea to me, and most surprising,’ he said. ‘Harris is eccentric, but he is a man of position, and a wealthy man, too. The last thing I heard about him was that he had given a fancy price for a bit of land adjoining that farm of yours that Crofton wanted, and that he was going to build upon it. A man like that has too much to lose to be easily tempted to commit a useless crime. What proof have you against him?’

‘I have the same proof that my father had, and more than you had against my father! Read that, and you will see why he did not use it, and why I must.’

Thus urged, the other drew out the contents of the envelope, and began to read them with stifled exclamations and audible notes of interrogation, to all of which Harold paid not the smallest heed, but sat like a

statue, waiting till the other should know all.

Mr. Bolingbroke was a long time over the reading—a time that seemed an eternity to the younger man's dumb self-concentrated impatience. But his first remark showed more perspicacity than his face gave evidence of.

‘If Crofton knew of all this, why didn't he speak of it before?’

‘I cannot tell! He didn't hold his tongue out of any love for my father! He wanted that land of Benson's, and thought to force my father to let him have it; that was why he came out with it when he did.’

‘It is a strange story! And it is twenty years old, which makes it hard to prove or to disprove. I must run through the main points again, to make it clear to my own mind.’

He opened out the papers neatly on the table as he spoke, not without a certain pride in his own grasp of the situation, and yet with genuine consternation. And Harold watched him quietly enough. He had gone over the whole thing to himself so often that once more made no difference—did not even drive the iron any deeper into his soul.

‘ Here is the certificate of your mother’s first marriage, to Thomas Collingwood—and Sam Crofton’s name as one of the witnesses, I see. And a copy of a letter from Crofton to her, after her marriage to your father, warning her that her husband, who had deserted her some years before, was still alive. A letter from her to Crofton, stating that she has seen *him* and that he had promised to be silent and to keep away, and entreating Crofton to do the

same. Then a certificate of the death of Thomas Collingwood, dated twenty years back, and of his burial at Newton Abbas, in Devonshire ; and a note by your father, saying that he has himself procured properly attested copies of both certificates. A torn envelope—in a lady's handwriting, presumably your mother's—addressed to “ Mr. Th. Collingwood, 7, Colville Road, Newton Ab——” the rest being torn off . . . And, lastly, a further note from your father stating that he went to Newton Abbas—made inquiries as to the death of Thomas Collingwood—found that it took place in the year stated ; and brought from the woman with whom he had lodged some of his effects, among which he found some letters undoubtedly written by the first Mrs. Malreward, when she was Mrs. Collingwood . . . . I—I am very sorry for you, Harold, my lad !”

The words broke from him impulsively, with an odd little half-laugh that meant anything but mirth, as he looked up with dismayed and altogether sympathetic eyes.

‘Thank you,’ said Harold, his lips paling just a little. ‘You think it is true, then?’

‘I am used to judge of evidence, having had some legal training, as you know. And I see only one flaw in it.’

‘And that?’

‘Crofton’s long silence. Why didn’t he speak out before?’

‘Perhaps he was thinking of his own children. You know, according to my grandfather’s settlement, they were the next heirs—before Phil was born. I suppose he hoped my father would not marry again, and did not want to drive him to do so. His marriage and Phil’s birth put the



Croftons out of the running. So then I suppose he thought he would keep his secret in hand till he could see how to make the most by it—probably till he could make his market with *me*.’

Harold spoke quietly enough, as if reasoning out some case that did not concern himself to any appreciable degree. And Mr. Bolingbroke looked at him with a new admiration, tempered with pity.

‘Very clearly argued!’ he said. ‘But I am afraid you hardly realise what this may mean for you. The decision cannot rest with me, but as Phil’s representative I shall be compelled to have the matter properly looked into and decided by competent authorities. And if they decide against you——’

‘Thornton Harris will at any rate have no more that he can do! You are a chess-

player, Mr. Bolingbroke, and you know what check by discovery means !'

'You mean to charge him with the murder, then?'

'Do you think I should have brought this story to you if that had not been my intention? I am afraid you do me more than justice ! Of course he will make the whole thing public as soon as I lift a finger against him ; but I shall, at all events, have the satisfaction of striking first.'

There was a pause. Harold's pride kept him very quiet, and Mr. Bolingbroke was trying to think how to put his next question.

'And you?' he said at last. 'What is to become of you, supposing this to be true?'

'I am not the first, and I shall not be the last,' answered Harold, with a stoicism

half real and half assumed. ‘My grandfather had a brother, whom you may remember, whose name was not Malreward, any more than—mine may be! He had an allowance, I believe, until the family got tired of giving it him; and then he tried one thing after another, and ended as watcher under old Bilson the game-keeper.’

‘Don’t talk like that! This—this may be all an invention of Crofton’s, and, if not, your bringing-up has been very different to that poor fellow’s.’

‘Hardly so useful, I suppose. But I daresay I might come to be head-keeper, in time.’

Harold smiled a little grimly as he spoke. He knew that he had not realised the prospect, and that Mr. Bolingbroke would probably tell him as much; but he knew,

too, that he could not realise any prospect as yet, and had better not try to do so.

Mr. Bolingbroke laughed again—a laugh this time of vague sympathetic distress.

‘Your friends could never allow that, even if the worst came to the worst. You must permit me to use my influence——’

‘Thanks!’ interrupted Harold. ‘I am sure you will understand me when I say that I would rather not discuss anything of that sort at present. If you will be good enough to go into my father’s affairs with me, and advise me as to the best way of bringing Harris to book? You owe him that much amends at least for having condemned him unheard.’

There was such calm, absolute conviction in his tone that Mr. Bolingbroke forgot that as yet he had no proof that he had been in the wrong.

‘I do!’ he answered, heartily. ‘Somehow I never felt easy in the belief; though your poor father’s strange conduct seemed to leave one no alternative. Let me hear the whole story, and my best advice and help are at your service.’

When Harold left Ashleigh, at the close of his long interview with its owner, he carried away a somewhat lighter heart than he had brought there with him, although Mr. Bolingbroke seemed to think so poorly of his future prospects. He had himself virtually given up his prospects when he resolved to make the whole secret known, and had tasted the bitterness of the renunciation, and knew that more bitterness lay beyond the blank that for the present seemed to have engulfed all his future.

But meanwhile there was at least the joy of battle to come—the excitement of bringing Thornton Harris to justice, and the sombre satisfaction of keeping to the letter the promises he had made to his dead father. Both promises—not only the one that he had willingly taken on himself but the one that he had made in ignorance, little dreaming what would be the cost.

After that, the deluge! Possibly he might find something to do, though he felt in himself no special aptitude that might decide his course in life. Certainly the old friends of the family would be willing to help as well as advise—if he would let them. And certainly he must lose no time in putting such talents as he had to some profitable use—for Alicia's sake.

Harold had not come thus far without many thoughts of Alicia, and of all that

this would mean for her. The loss of wealth and position for her, the long time that must pass before he could be able to marry her, had been the bitterest drops in the bitter cup that he had had to drink. But he remembered certain words of hers that gave him some comfort. ‘I would never try to stand between a man and his ideas of honour.’ A woman who could say that, and look as Alicia had done while she said it, would never blame her lover for conduct that the world might call Quixotic; would wait patiently for him and share poverty with him, if honour demanded it. It would be hard to tell her, but when once she was told the worst would be over.

And meanwhile, except to Alicia, there was nothing to tell, until the first move had been made against Thornton Harris, and he had retaliated, as he undoubtedly

would, by lodging the papers he held in the hands of the person most bound to use them against Harold. That person was of course Mr. Bolingbroke, who for the present had quite enrolled himself on Harold's side, and had resolved to do nothing until official information received should oblige him to do so. And in the first place, by his advice, Harold was going to interview the superintendent of the police at Aldersford, to charge Harris with murder, or, at any rate, manslaughter, and to set the police on the track of the two witnesses, or rather accessories, Will and Joe Herne. Then he would go home and sleep. He had not slept for two nights, a thing that had never happened to him in his life before, and now that the die was cast—now that the first step was taken and there was no going back—he found out how weary



he was, and how pleasant sleep would be—the only thing that he cared just now to look forward to.

Harold let himself think of it, and let his horse drop into a walk along the quiet country lane, still with the death-like stillness of a calm winter's day, till he actually fell half-asleep in the saddle, as others have done before him. More than half-asleep, perhaps, for he certainly had a fragment of a dream. He was back in the 'justice-room' at Mr. Walrond's, in his gipsy disguise, and Elizabeth was there, and it seemed to him that she had found him out, as she did before. But she said, 'I beg your pardon, Mr. Malreward! Is it safe to ride like that?' And he awoke with a start, and found that the horse had stopped, and Elizabeth Walrond was standing at his bridle-rein.

‘Thank you, it is quite safe!’ he answered, smiling and colouring. ‘Unless the horse were to stumble : and Prince is very sure-footed. But I am sorry if I startled you. I did not expect to meet anyone here. Are you not a long way from home?’

‘Rather! But I often walk as far,’ she said, colouring a little in her turn, as he dismounted and drew the rein over his arm. ‘I have an escort, you see,’ and she glanced at the big collie, who was critically examining horse and rider. ‘I am sorry I disturbed you, if a nap on horseback is really a desirable thing!’

‘It isn’t, and I am much obliged to you,’ answered Harold, frankly, walking on by her side. ‘I was thinking last night instead of sleeping, and the night before too—that is my excuse.’

‘Yes?’ she said: and he remembered that he had promised to tell her the result of his search, and that now would be as good a time as any.

‘I promised to tell you what I found out on my wanderings,’ he said, abruptly. ‘I will tell you now, if you choose, for perhaps I may not have another opportunity. But, if you are so good as to care to hear, will you also be so good as to say nothing about it at present, unless to your father?’

‘Of course! But don’t tell me, unless you would rather.’

‘I was more successful than I expected,’ he went on, with a grim smile. ‘I found out too much! I can lay my hand now upon Crofton’s murderer, I believe, and I am on my way at this moment to give information against him. But I believe he can ruin me in return, and he will certainly

try it. It comes to this, that if I clear my father's name I shall most likely lose my own !'

'Lose—your own?' she repeated, with a startled look.

'Yes! And everything else with it. My place in the world; and even the dear old house. I never knew before how much I cared for it.'

Harold's voice broke and trembled, and he turned his face a little away. Those startled, pitying eyes tried his composure more than Mr. Bolingbroke's dismay and kindly offers of assistance. He began to pity himself a little more, in face of that unspoken compassion.

'I am so sorry,' said Elizabeth, simply; 'but—it seems so strange! Are you quite sure?'

'Not quite; but I have such good reason

to fear that I would rather not try to hope. It is better to be sure of the worst at once than to be torn two ways any longer. It must be a great help in leading a forlorn hope if a man *knows* that he will be killed.'

'Is it so bad as that?'

'Something like it. My life will come to an end there—to a dead stop! And what is to come after I can't guess as yet. But if all goes well I shall have cleared my father's name, and made things right for Phil. So I shall at all events make a creditable exit from this present life.'

Something in the brave, would-be-cheery tone made Elizabeth's lips quiver. Her companion might have bemoaned himself tragically enough and have got little sympathy from her; but just now her sympathy was too keen for words, or at any rate her voice was not to be trusted. And

Harold saw her emotion, though he did not seem to be looking at her. What with weariness, and the calm that comes from the mingling of relief and despair, he had been thinking aloud rather than framing his speech with regard to her. But now the tears in her eyes recalled him to the present.

‘You know we played together when we were children,’ he said. ‘I remember it, though you hardly can. I suppose that is why I feel as if I had known you a long time, and trouble you with all this. I could even bring myself to tell you all the details, hard as some of them are to speak of. But I won’t. You’ll hear them all soon enough, and Mr. Walrond will explain——’

‘Father will be grieved,’ said Elizabeth, a little unsteadily. ‘You must let us

hope that things will not be quite so bad.'

'Thank you. And for the present I am still Harold Malreward, and may claim his privileges. I will come over some day soon and see your father, before I—go away.'

'Are you going away, then?'

'I must, if things are as I think. I shall have no place here any more, and whatever I may find to do had better be as far away as possible. I should feel too like a ghost——'

They had reached the ending of the lane, the turning where their ways parted, and he checked his horse and paused, leaning against the black, glossy shoulder, while she too lingered, trying to find something to say that should express part, at least, of what she felt. The young man whose face was 'like the first chapter of a

novel,' had suddenly developed, in her eyes, into the hero of such a romance as she had not dreamed of. And it seemed to Elizabeth that she would like to have her share in the romance, if only the speaking of a word of encouragement, and that when they had parted she should think of many things she would gladly have said.

Meanwhile, an indefinable impulse prompted Harold to carry his confidence a little further.

'I said there would be nothing left, but I was wrong,' he said, colouring again. 'There will be—some one. I shall be bound to make the best of the new life, because of her. I should have been married soon if it had not been for all this. As it is, I shall have to ask her to wait for me, and the feeling that she is waiting



will make it worth while to fight through with it.'

Elizabeth might have heard some rumours of this before, but somehow this intimation unloosed her tongue, especially as she guessed to whom he referred, and had a profound girlish admiration for Alicia Colvin's beautiful face, of which she had once or twice had a glimpse, though the well-to-do Colvins had not as yet 'evened' themselves to call upon Mr. Walrond.

'I know you will make a brave fight of it,' she said, holding out her hand, 'and father will not let you forget us, even if you go away. He will be proud of you—and so shall I.'

'He would not be, or you either, if you knew what a struggle it has been to be even commonly honest!'

‘ You do—us—an injustice,’ answered Elizabeth, her eyes sparkling through a bright film of tears. ‘ Do you think we can’t understand ? Of course it must be a hard struggle, but I shall always be glad and proud to think that I knew about it all, and that you—won !’

‘ And I—am glad I told you. There is no going back now, however bad it may be ; and you are helping me not to repent. I said once before that I could never thank you properly——’

He paused, still holding the hand that she had given to him as she spoke, and their eyes met, with an odd sensation on both sides that they had never really met before. Never before ; and here, for one instant, in the still, breathless solitude, there was nothing and no one else in the world.

The leafless trees made an archway of the narrow lane at the end of which they were standing, and behind them the sunset gates blazed with the evanescent glories of a winter's evening. How like lovers the two figures looked, hand in hand, darkly outlined against that pale splendour! A quick-witted old crone, coming up the cross-road, effaced herself, and slipped by almost in the hedge, with a sympathetic recollection of her own courting days.

Nothing was farther from their thoughts, for all that. Harold had plenty else to think of, even if he had not been heart and soul Alicia's; and, as for Elizabeth, she was happy in having found a hero, and honestly did not care in the least whether it was her hero or not.

## CHAPTER III.

## I HAVE SEEN YOUR CARDS.

Let them fight it out, friend ! things have gone too far,  
God must judge the couple ; leave them as they are.

——Let go there ! Both the fighters to their places.

*Before.* R. BROWNING.

ALL the next day, Harold chafed considerably at the multiplicity of business that made it impossible for him to go over to Netherfold.

But, by the time he had slept another night on it, he was aware of an increasing reluctance to tell Alicia of his resolution,

until its consequences were certain. It had seemed at first that he owed her an explanation: but why give it before it was absolutely necessary?—why drag her, a day sooner than was needful, into the suspense that was making his own heart sick?

‘When it is all over I shall have to offer her her liberty, of course!’ he said to himself, with a little smile. ‘Well! I am nearly as sure of her as she is of me. But it would be hardly fair to do it while there is still a chance that I *am* the man she took me for!—unless the news comes to her first from another quarter.’

Considering all things, it seemed probable that the news would reach Miss Colvin from some other quarter; and the final result of Harold’s meditations that morning was that he wrote a letter—al-

most the first he had ever written to his lady-love.

‘Very strange things seem to be coming to light,’ he wrote, in his abrupt unliterary fashion; ‘but I would rather not tell you about them till I know what the truth is, and how it is likely to affect us. At present I am certain of nothing, except that I love you, and always shall. But if you hear of this from anyone else, as you probably will, let me know, and I will tell you all I can. It was your right to have been told first, but that could not very well be, and, after all, I know which way you would have advised me.’

This missive despatched, Harold was at liberty to attend to another claim upon his time and attention; a little, oddly-spelt note from old Bilson, the gamekeeper, written in his hermitage on Thansley

Moor, and requesting young Master Harold 'to come up forthwith and speak upon important business.'

Phil happened to be near when Harold ordered his horse, to comply with this request; and looked up with wistful eyes that suggested to his stepbrother that he might ask him to come too.

'If things are as I think, we sha'n't have many more rides together!' he thought. 'And I shall have to go on foot for many a day. So he may as well come now if he wants to.'

Phil came; and discreetly said nothing upon the one subject that most interested them both just now. And they rode on, talking of birds and animals, of sport and game-preserving, as became two sons of a country gentleman, and not at all as if both were thinking of something quite dif-

ferent. But it was an effort that need not be kept up, and presently Harold relapsed into silence, riding slowly, and looking about him with long, earnest glances, as one who knows that he may never look again, with the same eyes, on moor and stream and winding sheltered valley.

And so, silently, they came to the top of a long ascent, and saw before them the wide, bare expanse of Thansley Moor, deathlike now in its winter covering of withered bracken and shrivelled heather.

The short winter afternoon was not half over, but already the hollows were full of mist and shadow ; and the low, round hill that was crowned by the keeper's lodge rose like an island out of a pale grey sea.

The gate was locked that led from the road on to the moor, and Harold had forgotten to bring his key. But he woke up



from his silent, abstracted mood to express his satisfaction in finding it so, as they leaped the low fence beside it, and looked jealously at some wheel-tracks in the mossy, grassy drive that led up to the lodge.

How lonesome it looked under the empty sky! without a bush or tree near it to break the square, sturdy outline, without a living creature moving anywhere in sight. Only one thing could have made it look more lonesome—the fierce sunlight of a July noontide.

Phil was wondering how anybody could bear to live there, and Harold was thinking that under the circumstances, if it were not for Alicia, he could be content to take up his abode there, and forget the world as utterly as it would forget him. And so he would have been—for a short time.

The mood was real enough, while it lasted, and it was only natural that to him it should seem final. Some men may be able to lose suddenly all they have in the world, and yet retain not only their common-sense but the even balance of their nerves and temper. But Harold was not one of these. He had had as heavy a blow as he could bear ; and it took all the strength he could muster to walk upright, and hide the wound from eyes that it did not concern. He could not, except now and then, look forward to the time when it would be healed, when all this would be a thing of the past, and the world going forward on its course again.

Here they were at the lodge-door, however, and the horses must be taken round to the little shed at the back, and the old gamekeeper roused out of his afternoon

doze over the fire to admit his two visitors.

His impassive, weather-beaten face and deliberate voice gave little promise of shrewdness; but Harold knew him well enough to let him take his time, and make his own opportunity for private speech. And he seated the brothers beside his fire, and questioned them as to the welfare of all the Malreward family, collectively and individually; and delivered his official report of the state of the grouse, as if he had nothing more important to say.

‘No, Master Philip,’ he answered, presently, as the boy began to question in his turn, ‘I don’t feel lonesome up here by myself. I’ve not been down in the village since—last October; and I’ve no wish to go. I was fair dazed then with seeing so many folks.’

Phil said no more for the moment. Both

he and Harold remembered the old man's face among the few round their father's grave. Perhaps the keeper saw a fresh shadow on the two young faces; for he went to another subject with unusual loquacity.

‘Young Mr. Walrond was up here the other day. He is a pleasant-spoken young gentleman, and makes a man think of his latter end. But he'll never fill his father's shoes.’

‘That's the case with a good many of us!’ said Harold, significantly, half to himself. And the old man turned sharply, and shot a keen glance at him from under his grey, shaggy brows.

‘Nay!’ he went on, slowly. ‘He seemed to know nought of sport; the young gentleman didn't. But eh! to see Parson Walrond, when he was in the countryside

before ! There wasn't his equal with a gun or a dog, except your father, Mr. Harold. It's a wonder to me that he hasn't brought up his son different.'

Harold half smiled, but made no answer ; and there was silence for a minute till the old keeper rose, and, with the fine, old-fashioned courtesy of the poor, requested Mr. Phil to excuse them, and Mr. Harold to ' step this way.'

Harold complied, and was led into the little bed-room adjoining, and the door carefully closed behind them.

' That varmin, sir, that you brought me to look after,' began the old man, with a grimly humorous look, ' I looked after him well, till the police come and fetched him away the day before yesterday. I was glad enough to be rid of him, but my gentleman hadn't done much before that with-

out my knowing of it, and I found out that he had something with him that needed uncommon care taken of it. So I took care that, when they fetched him, he should have no chance of taking it with him, nor hiding it in a fresh place. I've got it here, Mr. Harold, and it belongs to you, I judge, as much as it does to anyone.'

He unlocked, as he ended, a carved-oak chest, or 'ark,' as he would have called it, that stood beside the bed, and took out a small parcel, folded in a piece of tumbled newspaper, which he handed to Harold.

There were three things in it: first, a neck-handkerchief, dragged and torn, as if it had been forcibly clutched and pulled from the neck that wore it. In this was stuck a gold pin, with a head set with pearls, at the back of which were engraved the two letters, T. H. Then a white hand-

kerchief, also marked with the same two letters.

‘Thornton Harris!’ said Harold to himself, as he looked at the marks. ‘If anyone can bear witness to his having come in without a necktie that night, Master Joe will have been right in thinking this of value. What more is there, I wonder?’

There was a paper carefully folded in the handkerchief, and written on both sides.

Harold opened it and began to read, the keeper drew a little nearer, and watched him with an anxious look.

At first it seemed utterly unintelligible, so besprinkled was it with erasures and corrections, and in many places the same words written twice or three times over. But as it went on it grew clearer, and Harold knew that he had seen the hand-writing

before. It was his mother's writing, as he had seen it in that letter of hers to Sam Crofton, and in her few letters to his father, which he had found among the dead man's papers.

This, too, seemed to be addressed to Philip Malreward, and as it grew more coherent it was plain that the writer was confessing a wrong that she had unwittingly done him—confessing that she had discovered since their marriage that her first husband was still alive, and that hitherto she had been afraid to tell him.

‘This must have been in Crofton's pocket-book, along with those that Joe gave to my father,’ thought Harold, and forgot to wonder how his mother's confession could have got into Sam Crofton's keeping. Somehow the blotted, half-illegible writing, with its broken expressions of fear and



penitence, had softened his heart towards his unknown mother, of whom he had had some hard thoughts of late.

Never before had he realised her enough to wish her back ; but now, reading how she had all unwittingly ruined his life and her own, that familiar picture in the library at Alston Crucis seemed to start suddenly into life, with wistful eyes pleading for a forgiveness that it would have been good to grant.

Slowly Harold folded the paper again, and put it into his breast pocket, then gathered up the other things, and instinctively chose another pocket to thrust them into. Bilson was watching all the time, with eyes in which anxiety slowly changed to wonder ; but he said nothing. Perhaps he was unwilling to let Harold know that he had read the paper and guessed the

secret, or perhaps he was only silent and discreet by the habit of a lifetime.

‘Thank you,’ said Harold, leading the way back to the outer room : ‘I shall do more with these than anyone else will—you’re right so far. And now we’ll get the horses out and be going. It’ll be dark before we are at home.’

He thrust some gold into the old man’s hand as he spoke, with a sudden recollection that if the money *was* all Phil’s the keeper would be none the less welcome to this. And the boy tore himself from the contemplation of the various remarkable birds and beasts that adorned the wall, rendered more remarkable by the hands of the local taxidermist than ever they had been by their Maker, though perhaps losing something in beauty under the process.

The brothers had mounted, and were just

going to ride away when Harold turned in his saddle for one last word.

‘Come down into the village, soon,’ he said, significantly; ‘there’ll be something for you to hear, I think.’

‘Good news or bad, Mr. Harold?’ asked the keeper, laying his wrinkled, massive hand on the young man’s knee.

‘A little of both, perhaps. Something that I know you’ll be glad of, and something that perhaps you’ll be sorry for—like the business you had with me to-day. Good-bye! and good luck to you, any way.’

They were gone, riding swiftly down that long green streak that parted the dusky heather; and the old man stood watching them, long after to ordinary eyes they would have been lost in the gathering dusk.

‘He takes it like his father’s own son!’

he said to himself, with a smile of stern approval. 'He's a right Malreward, let the law say what it will, and let him look as like a gipsy as he can stare! Nay, I will say this for that lot, that they can die as game as if they were gentlefolks, and make no more fuss about what can't be helped than a fox among the hounds.'

'Phil!' said Harold, as they neared the high-road. 'Why don't you ask questions?'

'You said you would tell me when there was anything to tell,' answered the boy, with a quick, wistful look.

'Yes! and now there is something, and yet I would rather not tell it. Will you wait, Phil? You'll hear it soon enough.'

'I'll wait if you'd rather I did, of course. But, whether it's bad or good, I should have thought——'

'Ay! but it's of a very mixed complex-

ion, for you as well as for me, though some folks would not think so. Our father's name will be cleared, I believe, very soon, and yet you will be sorry. Remember, Phil—when it is all over, and I am gone away, and everyone is congratulating you—remember that I knew you would be sorry.'

'Going away? Are you going? Where?' cried Phil, seizing upon the one clause of this incomprehensible speech that conveyed some meaning to him.

'If I could tell you that I could tell you a good deal more. Have patience, Phil! I don't want to make my last dying speech and confession yet; but I shall not go away without making it.'

He set spurs to his horse even while he was speaking, and dashed off at such a rate that Phil's pony was obliged, nothing

loth, to scamper its hardest in order not to be left too far behind. Nothing more was said, and Harold hardly slackened his pace till they had reached the brow of the hill, or rather of the lofty, undulating table-land, and looked down over the wide net-work of valleys that held Alston Crucis in its midst, lost to view, at this distance, amongst its immemorial elms.

The winter evening was falling, grey and still ; the mist was creeping up the valleys ; the dusky purple outlines of the woods were blurred and dim. To a stranger it would have seemed that the landscape could not appear to advantage ; but one at least of those who now looked out over it from that wind-swept height, loved it better thus than in its sunniest aspect.

Harold drew rein, and sat for a moment motionless, looking down, tracing the

outline of each winding lane and coppice, wondering when and how his eyes should rest on those familiar outlines again: till one road drew his gaze from all the rest, as by a spell.

A long straight road, that from here seemed but a line of clearer grey, faintly defined as it crossed the soft grey curves of the far hill-side opposite. It looked like the way into the wide world, into the cold unknown; the way that he must go when he turned his back on the old home below there in the sheltered valley and went away; carrying nothing away with him, any more than other men do when they die and find that their pomp cannot follow them. Truly, as he had said, this to which he had made up his mind was oddly like dying, and mere human nature might be pardoned for

shrinking from it, as it does from death itself.

Phil pressed a little closer to his brother's side, trying perhaps to find a clue to the mystery that perplexed him in the direction of those wistful, inscrutable eyes. And Harold turned to him with a strange smile.

‘Let us be thankful, lad, that secrets once told can never be got under lock and key again! Otherwise, some battles would have to be fought many times over, and God knows how they would end! Come! let's go home.’

‘What's that crowd down in the field yonder?’ asked Harold, when they were within half-a-mile of Alston Crucis, speaking for the first time since they began to descend the hill. Phil had noticed the



unusual congregation some time since, but had not spoken of it, being sore-hearted and the least little bit offended. He looked up now without answering, and Harold turned down a rough occupation-road that led into the fields ; the keen local interests of one born and bred in the country-side reasserting themselves in spite of the ghostly feeling that his late thoughts had given him.

‘ Whose land are they on ? ’ asked Phil, after a moment, following.

‘ It’s Dent’s farm. No ! by Jove !—it’s Thornton Harris’s now ! ’ said Harold, with a start, and an involuntary touch of the spur that made his horse start too. ‘ Come on ! This means something, and we’ll be in at the death. ’

He hurried on down the lane, but drew rein at the gate of the flat, rushy field in

which the crowd was assembled. Whatever it meant, it was not what he had thought. A gang of men, who looked like navvies, had already broken ground in the middle of the field, and were apparently beginning to dig a well—but that a well is rarely fifteen feet across. Most of those who composed the crowd were only spectators, and amongst them Thornton Harris's tall figure was conspicuous in a light grey overcoat, while his dog-cart was standing near the gate, the horse held by Will Herne's successor.

‘What is it?’ asked Harold of a labouring man who was standing in the lane, looking on with slow curiosity.

‘They say they’ve gotten coal under this here,’ answered the man, in a ponderously dramatic fashion, striking the ground with his heavy boot. ‘And Lawyer Harris bow’t

it nobbut a two week ago ! Eh ! but some folks have the divil's own luck !'

Harold set his teeth, and said something between them that he would not have chosen Phil to hear. It *was* the devil's own luck—or that clever individual's foresight—and yet 'Lawyer Harris' might not have much enjoyment of the wealth that this might mean. There was a sword hanging over the head of that man there in the light overcoat, talking so gaily to the friend beside him, and watching the busy workers who were laying the foundation of his fortunes so deep. And the only man present who knew of the sword's existence found a certain fascination in watching him, and wondering when and how it would fall.

Harold lingered, listening to the desultory talk going on around the new-made

opening—talk that travelled far on the still air of the winter evening. And presently, as he listened, he heard a word that sent the blood tingling to his heart with the shock of a new idea. ‘Further down? They say it runs all along under—’ *Benson’s farm!* Was there coal under that, too?—and did that account for Crofton’s mad desire to possess it, and for many other things besides?

‘It is so, and they knew it!’ said Harold to himself, with a flash of certainty. ‘Well! we can dig on that side as well as they can on this; and I shall be—Phil will be—a richer man than any of his fathers; and Thornton Harris may have made a discovery for some one else to profit by, as better men have done before him!’

Phil, watching with interest the novel proceedings, but by no means realising

what all this might mean, wondered why Harold laughed so oddly to himself as he too looked on. In another moment he wondered still more, for his brother suddenly leaned over and clutched him by the shoulder with unconscious vigour, pointing to a small dark group that was slowly drawing near the gate by which they stood.

‘Look there!’ he said. ‘We are in at the death, after all! Keep still—I wouldn’t have missed this for a good deal!’

The group in the field was breaking up. Either the men had done work for the day, or—as seemed most likely—the idler portion of the assembly had grown tired of watching them, and found the shelter of their pockets no longer sufficient to keep their hands warm. They strolled by twos and threes towards the gate, while

some struck homewards across the fields ; and Thornton Harris exchanged a few parting words with the mining engineer, and strode towards the gate likewise.

His man drew a little nearer with the dog-cart, and so did the little group of new-comers, two men in a familiar blue uniform, and a third in plain clothes.

Mr. Harris's foot was on the step of his cart when the last-mentioned individual touched him on the shoulder.

Sharply he turned, and recognised who it was that had presumed so far. And the same glance took in the two policemen, and just behind them Harold Malreward, looking down upon him with an expression that was very like that of the dowager Mrs. Malreward, as she sat by the fireside thinking of her dead son's enemies, and cursing them by her gods.

Thornton Harris was far too clever a man not to know what this meant ; and for an instant his face showed that he knew it. Swift as a flicker of lightning the expression was gone ; but to eyes that had been watching for it there was no more mistaking it than the flash that half-blinds you in the twentieth part of a second.

‘ It’s all right, Elliot ! ’ said the lawyer, blandly, after a moment, ‘ I had thought of sending up for a man or two, but I don’t know that it’s of any consequence. They are trespassing, of course, but——’

This form of address seemed at first to surprise the man to whom he spoke to the point of rendering him dumb. But in a moment he recovered his presence of mind, and a little sardonic smile that he habitually wore, and with which he hastened to interrupt.

‘ Beg pardon, sir, but it’s you we want. It might seem that we’d chosen a bad time ; but I’m sure you will see the wisdom of coming along quietly. I’ve a dog-cart at the end of the lane.’

‘ You want me ?’ repeated Harris, with precisely the right amount of astonishment in his voice. ‘ Why, pray ?’

‘ On charge of the murder of Mr. Crofton, your late partner. I suppose that with a gentleman in your profession I need not give the usual caution, nor expect any difficulties in the discharge of my duty.’

There was a kind of dry humour in Elliot’s tone ; and the other, whatever his thoughts may have been, was sufficiently at leisure from them to reply to it by a short half-laugh. The whole thing had been managed so quietly that no attention had been drawn to it. No one knew the mean-



ing of this little colloquy by the gate, but the bewildered groom and the still more bewildered Phil and the three emissaries of the law, and Harold, with eyes full of dark fire looking over their stolid and impassive heads.

‘This is a most preposterous thing!’ said Harris, after a momentary pause. ‘But of course I shall make no disturbance, here and now! Who has issued the warrant?’

‘Mr. Cowleyshaw.’

‘Humph! Well! he might have known better, and so might others. But I won’t blame him. One tale is good till another’s told.’

Hitherto he had not recognised Harold’s presence, even by a glance. But now he looked at him over Elliot’s head, with a look full of threatening triumph.

‘Good afternoon, Mr.—Malreward?’ he

said, with an indescribable pause and change of tone over the name. 'I am not surprised to see you here, and I shall not forget it! Come, Elliot; let me just send a message to my house by my man, and I am at your service.'

Harold laughed, and took off his hat with a gesture that reminded Phil of his father.

'Mr. Harris,' he said, in the politely cheerful tones in which men were wont, a hundred years ago, to answer a challenge to a duel. 'I did not trespass on your land to have the pleasure of saying, "I told you so." But, since I am here, permit me to tell you that I have seen your cards. And since, notwithstanding, I elect to play my own, you will perceive that the game is nearly over. If you lose, I am quite content to lose for company.'

## CHAPTER IV.

## IL GRAN' RIFIUTO.

There's nae mair fields to tyne, my dear,  
 And nae mair lands to gie !  
 . . . . .

There's mony a man gives house and land,  
 But nae man else gives *ye* !

A. C. SWINBURNE.

'ALICIA!' said Spencer Colvin, with conviction in his tone, 'you are either a very clever woman, or you have better luck than anyone has any right to expect. Which is it?'

Mr. Colvin had entered his sister's sitting-room hurriedly, like one primed with

important news, but he checked himself, and spoke with philosophic deliberation, as though he were really anxious to settle the point in question.

‘Both, perhaps!’ she said; and she also spoke deliberately, but with restrained excitement. ‘What makes you say that?’

‘Did you know that there was anything wrong with Harold Malreward?’ went on her brother, looking at her curiously; ‘or was it only a woman’s fancy for having two strings to her bow?’

‘Never mind that now,’ she cried, impatiently, rising to her feet. ‘What has happened? What have you heard?’

She looked so beautiful and so imperious that not even a brother could trifle with her any longer.

‘I’ll tell you,’ he said. ‘If you hear some of it for the second time, that’s not

my fault. This morning, on my way into town, I heard that Thornton Harris was arrested last night on the charge of being concerned in Crofton's murder.'

'*Thornton Harris?*'

'Ay! Why not? He is an old acquaintance of mine, but he is none too good to have been mixed up in it, as I know. However, my opinion of him is neither here nor there, luckily for him. He was brought up this morning for preliminary examination, before Cowleyshaw and Norton. They fixed it early, to keep it as private as possible, but I heard of it in time to be present, and found it as good as a play to be present at!'

'Was Harold there?'

'Yes! and a murderous temper he has gone away in! If I were Harris, I would keep out of his way for a bit. To begin

with, the case is dismissed for want of evidence, and Mr. Malreward was told that it was much if he escaped prosecution for conspiracy and defamation of character.'

'Why?—did not Thornton Harris do it, then?'

'Who knows? I dare say he did! But Norton is a personal friend of his, and Cowleyshaw will say anything that anybody tells him. Oh! it was fine to see Malreward's face! I felt repaid for certain occasions when he has wiped his shoes upon me, in his cursed off-hand fashion, and I have had to put up with it.'

'But how dare they dismiss the charge if there is evidence against him?'

'Oh! the evidence is fishy enough. That groom of Harris's who quarrelled with him and got discharged, and who is half a gipsy, and another gipsy who hasn't quite all his

wits. These were all the witnesses they attempted to call. And Harris easily proved that Malreward had been talking, among his gipsy relations, of how much he would give to anyone who would help him to fix the murder on any man but his father.'

Miss Colvin was sitting down again, and listening calmly enough, but for the intent glow of her eyes.

'Sit down,' she said, 'and take your time over this story. I should like a few more details, please.'

'Oh! you haven't heard the cream of it yet,' he answered, easily. 'Those two made their story hang very well together: I will say that. So well that if they had had half a character between them things would have looked bad for Harris. But he has pluck and coolness enough to out-

face the devil himself; and indeed, if their story is true, the devil himself must have helped him to account for everything as he did. At last there was an inquiry after some things that the half-wit said that he had picked up on the spot where the murder took place, and Malreward came forward and produced them,—said that they had been given to him by old Bilson, the keeper, who has had charge of the fellow lately.'

'Well? Go on! I can see there is something behind this. Why should Harold be ruined, even if Mr. Harris gets off free?'

'Why? Wait and see! There was a necktie, with a pin stuck in it, and Harris's initials on the pin, which the gipsy said he found clenched in the dead man's hand; and a pocket-handkerchief, also with Harris's initials; and another article, which



the young man professed to have found on the ground near the body. The house-keeper and one of the other servants swore that there was nothing unusual about Harris's appearance when he came in that night, and that the pin had been lost and inquired after some days before, and was supposed to have been stolen by the gipsy servant-man. All the same, I believe if any other two men in the court had been on the magistrate's bench, Harris would have been remanded, at any rate.'

'What was the third piece of evidence, then?'

'Ah! thereby hangs a tale! When that came on the *tapis* we had a scene, and a very pretty scene, in court. I've known Thornton Harris all my life, but I never saw him in a passion before. I wasn't quite sure before, whether he had it in him to

commit a murder, but I haven't any doubts now.'

'Spencer! I wish you were not so fond of hearing yourself talk!'

'What? Are you getting impatient at last? Never mind! you had better persuade yourself that you take no interest in Malreward, and that Cavenham is your first and only love. Harris would hardly have spoken as he did without he was pretty sure.'

'What was it he said, then?'

She had risen again, and was standing over her brother, superb in her impatient indignation. And Spencer Colvin half shut his eyes as if in alarm, and continued his narrative in the hurried tone of one saying a half-learned lesson, ludicrously contrasting with the words he repeated.

'He turned on Malreward and called

him an impostor and a bastard!—I beg your pardon!—you have been so well brought up that perhaps you don't know what that means?—He said that Mrs. Philip Malreward had committed bigamy, and knew it, and that her son was no more a Malreward, or the owner of Crucis, than any other gipsy. And, oddly enough, that paper which Malreward himself produced in court was his mother's confession of the facts, written to her husband. At least, so it purported to be, and he did not attempt to deny it.'

The young man paused again, provokingly. But this time his sister asked no questions, and showed no impatience. She walked across the room to the window, and leaned against the shutter, looking out with eyes that evidently saw nothing, and when he began to speak again

she half raised her hand to check him, as if she were not ready yet for anything further.

‘Well!’ said Spencer after a moment. ‘Malreward or not, he took it very coolly. Harris said that he should lodge the proofs of what he had said in the proper hands, and he answered that that was just what he wished, and that he had known of it before Mr. Harris thought well to speak, and had himself put the whole matter into the hands of his half-brother’s guardian and trustee. “And now,” he said, “may I hope that the court will leave off concerning itself with my private affairs, and return to the case on trial?”’

‘Something in the way he said that annoyed the magistrates considerably; and, what’s more, I believe Harris’s last move had driven most of the evidence out of their heads, as perhaps he meant it to

do. I should have had that half-witted gipsy back and made out whether he really did get hold of the paper and handkerchief as he said. And then I should have made Harris account for Mrs. Malreward's confession being found, after twenty years, in his or Crofton's possession. But that didn't seem to occur to anyone else. Norton asked if there was any more evidence, or if Elliot had hold of any clue that he considered worth following up. Then he and Cowleyshaw consulted together, and finally dismissed the charge, with an elegant expression of their sympathy with Mr. Harris in the annoyance to which he had been subjected, and a snub for Malreward, or whatever we are to call him now. By the way, I wouldn't wish my worst enemy to be in a greater fix than Cowleyshaw was ! He could have

made such a crushing speech to the nameless, penniless young rascal, who had been conspiring with his fellow-vagabonds to traduce a respectable member of society ! But then, there was just a chance that he might be addressing Mr. Malreward of Alston Crucis ! Between the two ideas he made such a mess of it as would have done your heart good to hear, and I thanked my stars again that I happened to be within hearing !

Alicia, apparently, was not grateful for the opportunity of hearing about it. She was still standing by the window ; the habitual grace of her attitude a little strained and rigid, and her beautiful eyes searching the whole world ‘out of doors,’ for something that they could not find.

‘What did—Harold—do ?’ she asked at last.

‘There was nothing that he could do.

He and Harris left the court together, and exchanged a few words at the door. I heard him say that he should see Harris hanged yet ; and Harris cooled down and grew diabolically polite all of a sudden, and said that he feared that Mr.—Collingwood, he supposed he must call him—would find his own affairs quite as much as he could manage, but that if he could assist in finding him any respectable situation he would be happy to do so ! I thought we should have had to part them ; but they parted themselves, and away they went. I believe Harris went straight off to Ashleigh, to see Bolingbroke, and show his proofs and set the matter properly on foot. And where your late *fiancé* went I don't know, and if I were you I wouldn't inquire. If this turns out false, the least said the soonest mended. And if it is true I suppose he will not trouble you any

more—or at any rate he can be warned not to do so.’

‘What does Ernest say about it?’

‘Ernest’s a fool! He was always fond of the fellow, and so he won’t believe a word of it!—as if his liking could get rid of the first Mrs. Malreward’s first marriage register! Ernest knows nothing about the matter but what I’ve told him, but of course you can ask his advice if you want to.’

‘Thanks; I don’t think I will,’ answered Alicia, listlessly. But she said no more, nor did she proceed to ‘talk over’ the matter as women always do when they want advice, whether they mean to follow it or not. Perhaps Spencer divined that she wanted his opinion even less than his brother’s, for in a few moments he quietly rose and left the room. After all, he had, and with reason, a very high opinion of



his sister's prudence and common-sense, and knew her not much more likely to be carried away by her feelings than he was himself.

Indeed, Alicia had done more thinking than feeling in the course of her life ; and if she was disturbed now it was because her feelings were vainly protesting against the course upon which her thoughts had fully decided ; against the last enactment of a tyranny to which they had been subject all her life. Reason might seem to have been somewhat hasty in deciding as to the truth of the story she had just heard ; but in the light of it she recalled Harold's mysterious letter, and reluctantly she made up her mind that it was true, or at least that she must resolve how she should act if it proved to be so.

‘ How pleasant it would be to be true to him in spite of all,’ murmured even

her well-drilled feelings, so long accustomed to be repressed. 'To add this one more grace to those you have already in his eyes; and to be worshipped and thanked and loved for ever!'

'Another woman might do it!' answered reason, with quiet mockery. 'Some sentimental, loving, romantic creature, who might or might not be happier than Alicia Colvin, but who would certainly be a being of quite a different order. He is romantic enough for both; but when it came to hard reality even his worship and gratitude would scarcely stand the strain.'

'It will be so hard for him to lose all,' sighed feeling, hardly yet subdued. 'I cannot do it if he will have nothing left.'

'He would be worse off than you, if you chose to marry him after all,' answered reason, with the sneer more pronounced. 'I think your affection would

be even less likely to stand the test than his, and then what would you be worth to him? But don't be uneasy—you will not do it! You think it would be pleasant; as a peaceably-disposed little tailor thinks it glorious to lead a forlorn hope. In the end, the tailor stays quietly at home and risks nothing—and so will you.'

It was only her own reason that ever said hard things to this proud, spoiled beauty. And generally she listened to these utterances with a certain complacency, as being her own after all. But to-day she sighed, as feeling's brief protest ended in the way she had always known it must end.

It was all right and inevitable, but it was not pleasant to think of having to explain it to the man who loved her. If only he would be content without explanation—if he would leave her alone, as

Spencer had suggested, until the matter had settled itself.

But that was not likely. He would want to know her feelings and intentions—had a right to know them. Moreover, if that second string to her bow, to which Spencer had alluded so coarsely, was to be of any use, the first one would certainly have to be cut away.

The hour when she would have to make a choice had been imminent for some time ; and Alicia had been aware before this that nothing could postpone it much longer. Now it had come, and the alternative that she had providentially kept for the second place was left to be the first and the best.

That was all, and her foresight was amply justified ; and yet there was an ache in that heart of hers whose very existence, except for anatomical purposes, some peo-

ple might have denied. She knew that she had a heart, though she did not mean to give way to it; and she had a dim prevision that it would ache more before all was done.

‘Is it true, then?’

‘I believe so. It will be tried, of course. But Mr. Bolingbroke’s lawyers think that I have no case, and Mr. Bolingbroke himself thinks the same. He said he was sorry, and I believe he was, though he and I were never friends.’

Now that the worst had come to the worst, Harold had learned to be very quiet over it. So quiet that Alicia would have been almost glad to see him break down, to hear him blame somebody or something, or storm and rave against his fate. She had fancied somehow that he would take

misfortune in a very different fashion, and his self-restraint frightened her. It seemed to her that the inevitable reaction would be all the greater, and she was afraid of it, for her own sake as well as his.

But Alicia, and even Harold himself, could hardly realise all that he had inherited from that old beldame in the kitchen chimney-corner at Alston Crucis. The Englishman has, or used to have, a stoicism of his own, not incompatible with fiery passion. But there are other races that can surpass him, both in stoicism and in fire. As a boy, Harold had been secretly proud to call himself one of 'The Nation'; and now, all unconsciously, the gipsy traditions were giving him a little help—the undefined result of a thousand years of wrong—of dogged patience and of subtle retaliation. A man must always

find it hard to sit down with the loss of all, to be powerless and yet not despair, to bide his time uncheered by any definite hope. But who should have learned that lesson if not the gipsy? And Harold was more of a gipsy even than he knew, and therefore had something at the bottom of his Pandora-box of troubles that prevented him from exhausting himself in useless complaints or in more useless anger.

Quietly, therefore, he told his story, with eyes that seemed to Alicia to be searching her face all the while for something that was not there. She did not mean it to be there—the assurance for which he was looking—and yet she was ashamed, as one who is being weighed in the balance only to be found wanting.

‘And so,’ he ended, ‘as far as one can see at present, I am not merely a ruined

man—I am nobody ! If I were only ruined I should be bound in honour to offer you your liberty ; but, as it is, you are free already. There is no such person as Harold Malreward—or will not be very shortly.’

He paused ; and Alicia’s heart beat faster than when her great ambition had been realised, nearly a year before, and the heir of Alston Crucis had asked her to be his wife. How little she had dreamed, then, of such a day as this ! and what a malignant trick of fate it was that had placed her, of all women, in a position that forced such a choice upon her.

The fire purred softly in the grate, and outside in the winter wind the leafless branches beat against the pane. Somehow she wished it were not winter. When all the air was warm with summer, it would



have seemed less cruel to send him away.

‘But you—what shall you do?’ she asked, postponing the inevitable.

‘I have had very little time to think of that as yet! There must be some work in the world that I could do. I doubt I haven’t it in me to make a fortune! But I think I have wit and energy enough to make a decent living; and I shall not want for friends when I can bring myself to let them help me. If I did accept their help, and prospered, and came back to find you free still—?’

Harold paused again, looking intently into that lovely, unresponsive face. It was by Alicia’s own will that the yearning of his tone found no response there; but the flash of his eyes seemed to scorch her when at last he took his gaze away.

‘Never mind!’ he said, and if the glance

had been fire the tone was ice. 'I had no right to imply a question. You are quite free, and there is no more to be said.'

'After all, nothing is certain as yet,' she said, and her voice, in spite of herself, took an apologetic tone. 'Why ask questions until the time comes when they *must* be answered?'

'I wish to God I had not asked this one! But, being once asked, can it rest there?'

'Some women could do it,' she answered, slowly. 'I could almost wish that I were one of them, but what is the use of wishing? I am ambitious above all things, and you have put it out of your power ever to satisfy my ambition. I love wealth and ease, and in narrow circumstances I should only fret your heart out and my own. I could not do it; and to pretend that I could

would only be more cruel, in the end, both to you and to myself.'

'If you think so, that is sufficient.'

The words were spoken slowly, and as if it were with terrible effort, but quietly still. And again Alicia wished that he would take it differently, or even that he would reproach her. If he had said more, perhaps conscience would have said less. And Harold had a right to speak, while conscience surely ought to have been pacified by the assurance that she was acting for the best.

But Harold's pride would not let him protest or beseech, or even reproach. If she had jilted him while he was still heir of Alston Crucis he might have entreated her to remember old vows and old kindness—but not now.

Truly, all was said! If he lingered, it

was not because there was anything more to say. Common-sense and prudence and all the virtues were on her side, and, as for the love that was all he had to offer, she knew what that was worth, and had found it not enough. If he lingered, it was as one lingers beside a grave, while the trench is filled in and the mound turfed over, not for aught to be done or hoped for, but simply because despair lacks energy.

He stood motionless, leaning against the mantel-shelf, looking neither at Alicia nor at anything else. And she moved restlessly up and down the room, with a stately grace that looked more like just offence than a conscience ill-at-ease. But, after the third turn or so, she paused beside him, laying a hand upon his arm, and looking pleadingly up into his face.

‘I am very sorry,’ she said, simply. ‘I hardly expect you to believe me. I sup-

pose, if a woman's love is not of the reckless sort that leads her to sacrifice herself and everyone else, she must not expect anyone to believe in it. I cannot change my whole nature, and so you will always think that I did not care at all.'

The beautiful eyes grew wide and soft with tears, the first that Harold had ever seen in them, and her lips quivered. It was so evidently herself and not Harold that she was compassionating, that his mood underwent a sudden change. When first she spoke, a thrill of mad wrath and of more unreasoning love had surged through his brain, and for an instant made the lovely face only a luminous mist before his eyes. In such a mood men have killed the women they loved, and themselves afterwards, taking death for the fit and only keeper of things so fair and false.

But suddenly, as she went on, Harold

saw her as she was—her strength and her weakness,—and did not blame her for it, as much as some men might have done. He even pitied her a little, though with that kind of pity that, if it be related to love, agrees with it no better than relations in general.

‘What can I say?’ he asked, with a shade less of effort, drawing himself up from his lounging position and looking down upon her. ‘I have nothing to offer, not even a complaint. I think now that I always felt that what I had to carry out would cost me you, amongst the rest. Well! I paid the price, and I can’t take it back, and perhaps would not, if I could. You may blame *me*, if you will, since it seems that my love, too, was not of the kind that comes first and before all.’

‘I don’t want to blame you!’ she said, feeling, perhaps, the subtle change in his

tone. 'If only you will not blame me, and let us, at least, part friends.'

'I suppose you cannot help it!' he answered, after a moment, with a strange half-smile. 'If any man had hinted to me, once, that you could not help it—!—Well! it doesn't matter. There is nothing more to say, except good-bye.'

Again that new something in his tone grated upon Alicia's ear. But she was too wise to speak of it—too wise even to attempt to defend herself any more, or to prolong what now was only pain to both.

'Good-bye, then,' she said, with a little sob in her voice. She held out both her hands and lifted her face to his. Oddly enough, at this instant, when, in fact, her worldly instincts were conclusively triumphing over her love, Alicia's little wiles and stately self-restraints were all forgotten. She wanted to kiss and be friends, like re-

pentant children after a quarrel, if only to soften the memory of this final parting in the years to come.

But perhaps Harold was not looking forward to the time when this would be only a memory. He did take captive those little appealing hands, but only held them lightly round the wrists, and even seemed to put her somewhat from him, while his eyes devoured her face with a bold, hungry gaze, before which her own faltered and fell.

‘Yes! you are very beautiful!’ he said, with a thrill of passion in his voice, but still with that half-smile that seemed to mock himself, not her. ‘I wonder how I could find the heart to give you up! Must I return your picture, too? or may keep it, and look at it sometimes, and say to myself, “That was the price I paid for my fancy, and what could man do more”?’



Would it annoy you to think that somewhere a nameless, penniless fellow had your picture—who might once have had the original?’

‘Keep it, if you like, but you had better burn it, and forget me.’

‘I shall not burn it, but I will forget—when I can.—Thank you!—*No!* A kiss from you would be like a leaf of my cheque-book, only valuable as representing something that no longer exists. Besides, you might be sorry for it afterwards, and I don’t wish you to be sorry, for that or anything else. Good-bye!’

All her life after, Alicia’s cheeks were hot when she thought of that moment, but they were pale enough now. She felt his slight motion of refusal even before he had spoken, and drew back with a stately gesture, while her heart was smouldering in a slow fire of shame.

‘ Good-bye ! ’ she said, and for an instant their hands met, and the coldness of his stung her like ice ; and then—he was gone.

If she repented,—if at that moment she could have called him back, she would have retracted all that she had said, and have vowed eternal fealty, in defiance of poverty and shame,—it was too late ! There was no place of repentance : and indeed, it may be best to have no chance of acting upon a sudden impulse that runs counter to the thoughts and intentions of a lifetime. Best, in one sense, and yet in another doubtless Dante’s nameless spirit knew, *before* he found his appointed circle in the Inferno, that he had made a ghastly mistake in making ‘ il gran ’ rifiuto.’ And perhaps Alicia Colvin knew it too.

Quietly still Harold rode away by lane

and bridle-path, choosing by instinct the winding ways that led into the loneliest heart of the country.

If this had befallen him first of all his mischances he would have had passion enough to spare for it, but he had none now, only a slow, cold rage and misery that sought no outlet. He did not want to go home, and beyond that he had neither want nor wish, positive or negative, not even that longing for rapid motion that is a sign of passion willing to exhaust itself.

If the horse had been impatient he would have let him go, and, once started, would perhaps have ridden him to death, unless he had happened to remember that in point of fact the beast was Phil's. But luckily for himself Black Prince was in a patient humour, and spared to madden his half-mad rider ; so that they two went

soberly along the darkening lonely lanes.

Who can tell what a man in such circumstances thinks of? Certainly not the man himself. Harold, indeed, was not thinking at all, though he might have been supposed to have more than enough to think about; but was merely watching a series of dissolving views—pictures that came and went before his eyes—forming themselves more or less vividly out of the gathering dusky twilight.

His father's face as he lay dying; the gipsies seated round his table with that empty chair at its foot; Joe Herne, at Thornton Harris's study window, with the lamplight streaming out into the dark garden; Mr. Bolingbroke's look of pitying respect; Cowleyshaw and Norton, with nods and winks, and whispered consultations, enacting Dogberry and Verges on the Magis-

terial Bench. These came and went ; but two remained through all—his false love's face of baffled ineffectual regret, and his enemy's triumphant smile of hate that was by no means ineffectual. These remained, because hate held them fast.

No ! He did not hate her. Only the girl he had loved was dead—twice dead,—fair body and fairer soul.

‘ Can I part her from herself, and love her as I knew  
her, kind ?

. . . . .  
I remember one that perished, sweetly did she speak  
and move,

Such a one do I remember, whom to look at was to  
love ’

It was no new trouble, heaven knows. Old as the hills, almost as old as love itself. But that fact comforted Harold no more than it comforts the rest of us when our turn comes. It would have comforted him a little to have been able to

hate Alicia, to have felt that she could have acted more worthily and would not, and thus was 'level to his hate.'

But that was denied him; the perfect face was fading in a chill grey mist of contempt; it only remained that he should scorn himself for having loved her.

Thornton Harris at any rate he would hate, and did hate, and perhaps that feeling alone was clear amid the chaos of dim, unformulated miseries.

Harold was by nature a good hater; and the action of the magistrates in dismissing the charge against Harris, which to some men would have been at least a check, had only quickened and intensified his determination to have both justice and vengeance. Was it likely that he would give up so easily what had already cost him so dear?

His enemy, in proceeding to do his best to ruin Harold, had had something more in his mind than mere retaliation. It seemed to him that he had less to fear from a disinherited outcast than from the master of Crucis with funds and friends at his command. But perhaps, if he had gauged his opponent's character more fully, he might have thought differently.

The owner of Alston Crucis might have found his zeal for justice cooled by time. The young man with a lady-love to work for, and a place to make in the world, might have found all his energies taken up by these things.

But both these were non-existent now. As far as his own consciousness and Thornton Harris were concerned, Harold was driven back already to first principles, literally to his own resources, to what

his own heart and brain could furnish.

And it may be that Thornton Harris would have slept less soundly at night if he had known what resources Harold found there ; what dogged endurance, what patient cunning and unyielding hate, what possibilities even of absolute unscrupulousness !

Harold Malreward would have fought his enemy fairly, and have been content with no victory that could not have been justified before all the world, and in the face of day. But there were many things that a nameless gipsy outcast might do, if he chose to sell his soul for a revenge that would still be no more than justice, though the world might not recognise it as such.

The future lay before him like a moonless midnight, black with that utter dark-



ness that seems to writhe and shift before the eyes that strive in vain to pierce it. But one thought stood out against it in clear relief, like red glowing fire against that sombre background.

‘There is no man who may not be ruined, killed, or punished in some way, if only the man who turns against him is desperate enough. He broke my father’s heart, and killed him as surely as he killed Crofton. He has ruined me too—though I blame him less for that—and driven me desperate. And now he is a lucky man if anything or anybody can deliver him out of my hand!’

That was what Harold brought with him out of the darkness and stillness of the sleeping fields, when at length in utter weariness he laid the rein on his horse’s

neck, and let him take the nearest road for home.

It was late when he reached Crucis, and went straight from the stable-yard, where the sleepy groom stared at him curiously, through that door beneath the porch, and down the passage that led to the old kitchen.

As he had expected, his grandmother was still sitting in her usual corner with her pipe between her fingers, staring with half-closed eyes into the glowing coals, and seeing who knows what visions there.

The firelight shone upon Harold's splashed riding dress and pale, weary face ; and she looked up as he came forward and scanned him from head to foot with one keen glance.

'I have been expecting you,' she said.  
'What is this my daughter tells me? You

should not have left those others to let your father's mother know of such things, if they *are* nought but lies.'

'It is all true enough, I believe,' he answered, almost absently, warming his brown fingers, numbed with holding the reins so long. 'Did the lines or the stars never warn you of this, grandmother?'

'No!' she answered, fiercely. 'And, if they had, would I have believed them? You to be a beggar and bastard, my bonny lad! Never a Malreward since the first of the name that filled his place better than you will!'

'His place! Ay, but what if it is not my place? I am sick of it all, anyway. I have one more thing to do, which I will do: and then—what does it matter? My father died here under his own roof, and no one remembers anything of him except

one cruel lie! I would as soon die under a holly-bush and be forgotten altogether!’

‘There is a long day’s journey betwixt you and your grave,’ answered the old sibyl, glancing again at the hand nearest to her. ‘The lines tell me that, at any rate. Under a holly-bush, say you? Would you go back to our people, then: to the tents where I nursed you when you were a baby, and be a king among them?’

‘They are no better than the rest. If Gabriel Herne would have helped me, as he should for kindred’s sake, I might have struck my blow this time and not have failed.’

‘You might be king,’ she murmured on, unheeding. ‘No better blood in the tribe than mine, if I had not loved a Gentile too well. And they would forget your Gentile blood for the sake of your learning and

your wit—and for looks, you might be the very Romany king that I saw when I was a young lass, come back from the dead.'

'A king of rogues and vagabonds!' said Harold, with a ghost of a smile. 'Grandmother, the world is changed since your day.'

'The *men* are altered! In my day no Rom would have betrayed another—even one who was but half a Rom—for gold or fee! But it is something to be master of them, even yet. Is it not better to be a king in the tents than to be mocked and scorned among the Gentiles?'

'Maybe! But, even so, it is not worth struggling for. There is but one thing left worth that, and our folks will not help me to it.'

'The women, my lad! Go to them.' And the memory of bygone power gave a

weird majesty to her wrinkled face. ‘My handsome lad may have his pick of the best of our Romany lasses. And, if you can get a gipsy woman to love you, she will get you what you want, if she goes to the devil for it—or bewitch you till you think of it no more.’

He had thrown himself wearily upon the rug at her feet, and laid his head against her knee, and her withered hand, more finely made than many a lady’s, stroked his dark hair with unwonted tenderness. It was strange comfort, this wild advice, that no man in his senses would follow, but it was more of comfort and sympathy than the whole world could offer elsewhere.

Perhaps, though, he flinched a little at those last words.

‘What?’ she said. ‘Is a Romany lass

not good enough for you? Ah! you don't know what we are like; but if you had stayed in the tents you would have known. Why, even your old grandame——'

She stopped, and laughed, as if waiting for him to question her, and he lifted his heavy eyes to her face, but did not speak.

'Foolish lad! you don't know what even I could do, though I sit here under a Gentile's roof, and the tribe have half forgotten me. What is it that you want now most in the world?'

Her eyes sparkled now like those of a young woman, and his seemed to take fire from hers, and his breath came quicker as he read the meaning of her look.

'You know!' he said.

'Ay! I know. You are a true Rom, after all, and you want what we all love—revenge! Time enough, when you have

had it, to think of name and house and land. But you are not free, as one of our folk should be; and the lie they have told of your father must never be true of you.'

'What would it matter? I have no name; and, whatever the law might say of it, I should think no more shame to stamp the life out of him than I would out of a snake!'

'It shall be done, my bonny lad! It shall be done, and you shall do it. But not with your own hand. If any man must run for it, or swing for it, it must not be you.'

'I am not anxious to swing, but I shall most likely run, in any case. And I could hardly find a man who was willing to take the chance for me.'

He spoke half absently, knowing it to



be impossible that he should hire a murderer to attempt Harris's life, and finding something stagey and absurd in the mere suggestion of it. But that weird old face bending over him was plainly quite in earnest.

‘I can find you a man,’ she said. ‘A man who would have killed the lawyer before now,—if he had had as many lives as hairs on his head,—only that he is no Rom, and so loves money even better than revenge. But maybe he means to have the money first, and the other after. Anyhow, you can give him the money, and then he'll not need any pressing to wait for the revenge no longer.’

‘You forget, I have no money now; it is all Phil's.’

‘That is all nonsense, and a lie of those lawyers. Are they not all liars together?’

Our folks can lie when they choose, when some one comes asking questions about what does not concern him : but not as the lawyers can. You should have more sense than to believe them. But, if you are foolish enough to let your own be for a bit, I have plenty : and who should have it but you ?

She lifted up her short dark skirt, and showed an old-fashioned pocket hanging from her waist, and beside it a stout canvas bag, larger than the pocket, and stuffed tolerably full. The old woman untied it, and the contents jingled as she poured them out into her lap.

‘There!’ she said; ‘all gold ! and enough to get all the lawyers in the county put an end to. The Hernes would do it cheap, if it wasn’t for the risk : and this man I tell you of will not stand for

risk, if you give him enough to get him safe out of the country, and start him in life again, across the water.'

Harold had always known of this store of his grandmother's, though not of its extent. At different times she had been wont to demand money, as her right; first of her husband, then of her son. Both had been ready to give liberally what she asked; and she had never spent anything except now and then in gifts to her wild kin. There was nothing of the miser about her, except that she enjoyed the sense of power that her hoard gave her; and it was literally true that it was all at Harold's disposal.

'You must go to our folks,' she went on, while Harold was wondering how he should refuse without angering her; 'and get them to tell you where Ned Coulson is

to be found. He may be in Colgrave, but I'm not sure. Gabe knows. Find him out, and ask him what he owes Lawyer Harris, and whether he would like to pay it! Tell him that you owe a debt there too: and he won't take much persuading to make him pay off both scores at once!'

Harold was silent, looking straight before him with lowering brows. He had still no intention of hiring an assassin's hand against his enemy; but he was thinking that he might be glad of an accomplice all the same. If it was simply a question of killing Thornton Harris, doubtless he could do it himself,—and get off scot-free afterwards or not, as the Fates might ordain. But if it was a question of doing better than killing him,—finding out his misdeeds and ruining him, and undoing in part the evil that he had done,—might not

an ally, made shifty and unscrupulous by hate, be found most useful ?

He was thinking that it might be worth while to hunt up this man Coulson, and find out what he was like, and what grievance he had against Harris, and how far his sense of wrong was likely to carry him. Thinking, too, that the routine of life at Alston Crucis during the next day, and all the days to come, would be almost unbearable. He could hardly shut himself up in the kitchen with his grandmother, and yet she was the only person in the house whom he cared to face, or with whom he felt in sympathy.

‘ You shall give me some money, if you will,’ he said at last. ‘ I will use it for my father’s memory, and against *him*, though not perhaps just as you say. You know where the Hernes are, I suppose ?’

‘Of course ! I can tell you, when you choose to go. Hold out your hand.’

She poured the gold coins; without counting them, into his outstretched palm; then, as he laughed, and would have put some of them back, she caught up the hand, and bent over it.

‘It has been well crossed now, and with gold,’ she said. ‘Trouble? Ay! and I read it here before it came. I see the end of it, too, whether you believe my word or not. Change, and a great danger, and then—There ! I will not tell you any more. Put up the gold, and go to sleep at my knee as you used to in the tents, twenty years ago. And you may dream, at least, that you are with our own people, with a Romany girl to watch for your waking,—and die for you, if you choose !’

## CHAPTER V.

## THOSE LEFT BEHIND.

But did she love him ? What if she did not ?

Then home was still the home of happiest years,  
No thought was exiled to partake his lot,  
Nor heart lost courage through foreboding fears.

*The Star's Monument.*

JOHN WALROND, in the meantime, while Fate had been making a shuttlecock of Harold Malreward, had been slowly coming to a resolution as momentous, and for him as difficult, as ever Harold's had been.

His position as his father's curate at Deerhurst had never been meant to be

permanent. Indeed, Mr. Walrond did not think that Deerhurst needed a curate, and frankly deplored that the holiday from sermon-writing that his son's presence gave him had not come in earlier, when he was still young enough to have enjoyed two days' hunting a week.

John, not finding a curacy quite to his mind just then available, had suggested that his father might be glad of a little more time for study; but Mr. Walrond only studied in his garden, or with his dogs on the moor, and improved his acquaintance with wild birds and beasts rather than with the Fathers. His simple practical sermons, more practical than his son's, had very little of the study about them; and though the villagers rather preferred 'Mr. John's' more soul-stirring phrases, they did not expect the 'old 'un'



to alter his style, nor did he intend to do so.

That being the case, and any sign of 'awakening' that John Walrond fancied he perceived among the younger members of the congregation being regarded by the rector with mingled vexation and amusement, it seemed necessary for the younger man to look out for a new sphere of work.

Where to go was the question that had perplexed him. Should he go to some quiet, slow-moving, old-fashioned place, where the little that he could accomplish would be regarded as a great religious revival, and he himself as the prophet of the new order of things? Or should he take service under a man he knew, a man of his own opinions and a born leader of men, who would drive him into under-

taking what his soul quailed to think of, and half despise him all the while—to work among rough men and women whose ready wit and coarse good-humour were more terrible to him than even active persecution, and who were nearly as uncongenial in a converted as in an unconverted state?

He saw the meaning of the alternative clearly enough, and still weighed it with a hesitation for which his father would have despised him if he had known of it; yet for which he did not deserve to be despised.

‘If you were half as much afraid as I am you would run away!’ retorted one gallant officer to another, who accused him of feeling nervous under fire. Another man, who felt half as much afraid as John Walrond did, would probably have found some excellent reason wherefore he could

serve his cause better in the less arduous post.

John Walrond hesitated, desponded, foresaw endless defeats and mortifications instead of anticipating the delight of battle with his peers, and finally wrote to his friend, offering himself to work among the navvies and colliers who, by their sudden influx, had just turned the quiet, old-fashioned town of Colgrave into a sort of Pandemonium.

His services were accepted, not perhaps with much enthusiasm, because his friend was fully aware of his deficiencies; but with gratitude, because workers in that over-ripe harvest-field were still very scarce.

His father and sister, so much more in sympathy with each other than he was with either of them, regarded his departure

with a little regret, and with some amused wonder as to what John would do in that *galère*.

And Mr. Walrond little dreamed that it was his own carelessly-expressed opinion that was driving his son to this—to him—desperate step. As little as John Walrond dreamed that the sense of duty and honour that forced him to take the post he dreaded, and so save his soul alive, was his direct inheritance from the jovial, unspiritually-minded old father whom he secretly mourned over as more than half a heathen.

All these deliberations and negotiations were being carried on while Harold was making his great discovery, and wavering between two alternatives that were, to all appearance, of considerably more dramatic importance. And, on John's last morning

at home, Mr. Walrond's attention was altogether diverted from his son's departure by the reports that had been flying about the neighbourhood for some days, and that had reached him, in a compact form and from a credible source, only the night before.

Something in the story had moved him out of his usual mood of kindly, cynical tolerance, and he was more 'put out' than Elizabeth had often seen him.

'Poor lad! poor lad!' he repeated, half to himself, after all that had at present reached Deerhurst had been told and retold. 'Truly the sins of the fathers are visited on the children! When old Harold must needs marry a gipsy,—only because he could have her in no other way, and when there was at least one other woman that he should have married, if all tales are true,—he little thought that the third

generation would see such an end to the good old name.'

'He did wrong, doubtless,' answered his son, while Elizabeth sat silent with wide, listening eyes. 'But it seems hard to make him responsible for his son's first wife having—more or less innocently—committed bigamy.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Walrond, in a somewhat snarling and captious tone. 'And what made his son, my good friend and an honourable gentleman, go and marry a woman from no one knew where, who might have had twenty husbands for all anyone knew, when there were a dozen women among his own people for him to pick and choose from? Perhaps you will say the wild blood of the new strain had nothing to say to that? and that was the beginning of all this.'

‘It is difficult to see an end to the consequences of any action. But we must hope that a man is not responsible for them all.’

‘Who knows? If a man is permitted to know of some of them, that must be in itself a pretty severe punishment. I understand now why poor Philip Malreward died of a broken heart, but it is well for him he did not live to see how it has ended.’

‘At any rate, he has, by his second marriage, left an undoubted heir to his name and property, failing his eldest son.’

Somehow, Elizabeth was grateful to her father for the impatient gesture with which he seemed to dismiss poor little Phil.

‘The boy? Yes! But it wasn’t about the boy that poor Malreward used to tell me with such pride on the rare occasions

when I heard from him. He cared more for Harold than for all the rest of the world put together, after his first wife died.'

'There is always a hope that it may not be possible to prove the illegality of the first marriage.'

'Ay, of course it may be long enough before the lawyers decide anything. But Bolingbroke tells me—I believe he is honestly sorry to believe it—that he has taken two first-rate opinions, and that their judgment goes with his own. And I wish that was the worst of it. I wish I could be sure that there was no truth in what that young scamp Norton, and that old idiot Cowleyshaw, said about conspiracy the other day.'

'Father!' cried Elizabeth, almost indignantly.

'Well, my dear! Heaven knows I have



no wish to think so. I liked the lad, for his own sake as well as for his father's. And I can well believe that he would never have done it for himself. But he was only too terribly in earnest about clearing his father's name, and those gipsy kindred of his would be tools very ready to his hands. I don't like the only witnesses being both of the name of Herne.'

'Can that half-witted young gipsy they speak of be the one that Dalton and Harris's man brought here that night?' asked John, meditatively.

'Not he! That one had all his wits about him,' answered Mr. Walrond, while his daughter blushed vividly. 'But he was a Herne, too; and I always thought he came from young Malreward, though he denied it. It is a miserable, tangled business, altogether.'

‘Father,’ said Elizabeth, taking her courage in both hands, ‘is it likely that Mr. Malreward would have conspired against Mr. Harris when he knew that it would ruin *him*, even if it cleared his father?’

‘No! not if he knew it. But I suppose he didn’t.’

‘I know he did!’ she said, the delicate flush of her face deepening with the effort it cost her to speak out. ‘I met him in the lane one day before Mr. Harris was arrested, and he told me something about it. He said that he was coming to see you, to tell you everything, and that you would explain it all to me. But I know he said that if he cleared his father’s name he might have to lose his own.’

‘H’m!’ said the rector, looking at her with keen, thoughtful eyes. ‘That looks

as though he himself believed in the story, anyway. But, on the other hand, he has never been to see me, after all; they say now he has gone off, no one knows where.'

'Since when?' asked John, while his sister's heart sank, she hardly knew why.

'He has been gone these three days, and has left no address. If he had a clear conscience in the other matter, why should he not have stayed and fought out the question of the succession like a man? Bolingbroke, as the boy's guardian, is bound to press his claim, and now there will be no one to take an active personal interest on the other side.'

Mr. Walrond was pleading against his own wishes, and would have been glad enough to hear his question satisfactorily answered. But John was beginning to

think about catching his train ; and Elizabeth had no answer ready, though woman-like her opinion was not a whit the less firmly-rooted because she had no reason to give for it.

No one said any more to her about the matter for the present. John went away, and Mr. Walrond either did not think the story a fit one to be discussed with his daughter, or did not wish her to be any further interested in the hero of it.

But perhaps all the more for that she thought of him. She fancied that she was angry with him for running away from his troubles, to the peril of his good name, but if it were indeed anger it was mingled with a good deal of tender pity. In her day-dreams she met him in a hundred unexpected ways and places, and spoke to him far more freely than ever she would

have done out of a dream, and remonstrated with his folly and pleaded with him not to let himself be beaten, after having begun so valiantly.

She knew that if by any wild chance she did meet Harold Malreward she should be neither so eloquent nor so plain-spoken as she had dreamed of being, but these fancies left her with a very decided wish to see him, and by-and-by something came to her knowledge that made these imaginary conversations still more difficult and delicate, and yet filled her all the more with indignant pity and sympathy.

Elizabeth was not more fond than a lady should be of listening to the gossip of the country-side, but a good deal found its way to her ears, nevertheless. Her old nurse was an inveterate gossip, though a kindly one, and naturally was not to be silenced

as a younger and less trustworthy person would have been.

And there filtered round to her, in that mysterious fashion by which servants learn a great deal more than their masters and mistresses dream of, a report which she forthwith conveyed to Elizabeth.

‘They say young Mr. Cavenham is engaged to be married. He was only a boy when master was here before, but the steel works have made a deal of money since then. He’s going to marry Miss Colvin, that you may have seen, Miss Elizabeth, driving about the lanes sometimes.’

‘I have seen her. Are you sure, nurse, about Mr. Cavenham?’

‘It’s true enough, Miss Elizabeth. They say Mrs. and Miss Cavenham aren’t best pleased. It’s true Colvins weren’t reckoned real gentlefolk in my young days ;

but I don't know what Cavenhams would have better. I've heard my mother say this young Mr. Cavenham's grandfather was only a working man, and I am sure Miss Colvin looks as if she might be the greatest lady in the land.'

Elizabeth was lost in thought, and did not answer. If this was true, and if Harold Malreward knew it, what wonder if he had disappeared,—gone away in despair and bitterness of spirit! Could she blame him any longer for not having had the heart to fight it out, when there was nothing left to fight for?

All thought of blame for him was lost in generous indignation, in womanly shame for the woman who could so fail a man at the crisis of his fate. Elizabeth had never envied Alicia Colvin her imperial beauty, but in her secret unrecognised thoughts she

did envy her the chance which she had thrown away unused, the chance of being a hero's guiding-star, possibly his salvation.

'They did say,' went on the old nurse, 'that Miss Colvin was going to marry young Mr. Malreward. But he's lost the estate and all his money now, by what I hear, and they Colvins' are not good blood enough to behave just the same to anyone that's in misfortune.'

'Why! does that make all the difference?' asked Elizabeth, with a faint smile. 'I think you would behave just the same to us if we were suddenly to come down in the world.'

'I should, Miss Elizabeth. But then I'm good blood myself, compared to some. My father, and my grandfather, and his father before him, were all honest folks,



and, if any of the Colvins could say as much as that it's news to me! Not but why it's a pity, for Miss Colvin's as handsome a lady as ever I saw; but handsome is that handsome does.'

Nurse nodded her head, and departed in her wisdom.

Truly, if a fair woman without discretion is like a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, to what shall we compare a fair woman who has less heart than discretion, and less soul than either? Our forefathers believed in Ellewomen, fair without and merely hollow within! Perhaps it would be better for some of their descendants if they had the same belief—and the wit to know an Ellewoman when they saw her.

The train that John Walrond was so anxious not to miss had not to convey him

far. An hour's journey along the valley brought him into what seemed another world, uglier, busier, and more populated ; and he alighted at the little new station at Colgrave, already overdone with traffic and surrounded by a wilderness of small red-brick houses.

His new rector met him at the station, a tall, well-made man, with a good-looking, sensible face that yet had a possibility of fanaticism somewhere about it ; and indeed the Reverend William Ravenstone was what some people called a fanatic, and owed his success in life, and, what was dearer to him, his success in 'winning souls,' to that very fact.

He talked incessantly as he and John Walrond walked up together towards the little town, which was perched on the hill-side, with half a mile between it and the

station, of what used to be country road, but now was town, in the ugliest stage of its development.

From particulars to generalities, from great matters to small ones, Mr. Ravenstone darted in a way that somewhat confused his companion's slower brain ; now sketching the character of a labouring man whose cottage they passed, now dwelling upon the prospects and progress of the Evangelical party all over the United Kingdom, now dwelling triumphantly upon the ' great door and effectual ' that he firmly believed had been opened to him to Colgrave, and now detailing a scheme for inducing the local authorities to take into serious consideration the state of the half-made roads around the town.

He was not too discursive, however, to give John Walrond, on his inquiry, a very

complete and almost appalling syllabus of the work cut out for him and for them all.

Of the actual labour John was not more afraid, perhaps, than his rector, but he was very much afraid of failure, and not, it may be, without good reason.

‘ We must work while we have the time,’ said Mr. Ravenstone, impressively. ‘ Coming events will I fear greatly interfere with the spread of the gospel, at least for a time, in this parish.’

‘ What events?’

‘ The election comes on, as of course you know, in less than six weeks ; and we shall have a great stir made in this town, all the more because the greater part of this enormous influx of population has no vote. Political feeling they have strongly enough, but no means of translating it into action

but by rioting, and endeavouring to intimidate those who can vote, and that feeling will be worked upon, I fear, without scruple.'

'By whom?'

'By all parties, I am afraid. We have always, hitherto, returned a Conservative for this division. Last time he was opposed by a moderate Liberal, who took his beating quietly enough. This time I believe both candidates will be opposed by a red-hot Radical, and from what I know of the man I doubt it is no lack of charity to say that he will hardly shrink from rousing the worst passions of the mob, and exciting them by the most reckless promises.'

'Who is he?'

'His name is Bevan. You will not have heard of him. He was nothing but a moderately-successful ironmaster until

quite lately. But a man has taken him up who belongs more to your 'side of the country—a man of the name of Norton, who owns property near you, I believe.'

'I know him. At least, I have heard my father speak of him.'

'He has political reasons, I suppose, for wanting to get Bevan in. And I know that he has said that he will leave no stone unturned to do so, and what that means I can guess.'

For the last few minutes, Mr. Ravenstone had been speaking in a sufficiently mundane fashion. But now he dropped suddenly into that tone which his enemies were wont to call canting and hypocritical, but which was neither one nor the other, though, in a sense, affected.

'You know how prone the adversary is to take the opportunity of any worldly ex-

citement to draw men's minds away from their immortal concerns. If we can only save a few souls before this turmoil begins, I shall feel less as though he were gaining a fatal advantage over us. I have a prayer-meeting to-night at the school-room at half-past seven. I hope, when you have made yourself comfortable in your lodgings and looked round you a little, you will feel able to join us.'

They had reached the rooms, above a small stationer's shop, which Mr. Ravenstone had already engaged for his new curate. And the rector went away with long strides to visit his sick; while John Walrond arranged his belongings in his deliberate and methodical fashion, and looked out, with a shrinking that he would not let himself realise, upon the bustling unlovely street.

Mr. Ravenstone came back in the afternoon, and took him on a tour of exploration in the little town: to the schools, which had been rapidly outgrown of late; to the fine old church, which had for a century or so been like a large nutshell with a shrivelled atom of kernel, and which was not much better filled at present, though time had at last brought a population to fill it.

And, coming down the steep, narrow street from the church into the marketplace, that was the focus for the rapidly-increasing business of the place, John saw a face that he knew. He forgot for the moment that after all he was but twenty miles from home, and the face startled him.

‘One of my father’s parishioners!’ he said, involuntarily turning his head to look



after that familiar figure. ‘What can he be doing here?’

‘Electioneering! I have seen him once or twice with Mr. Norton and the Radical candidate,’ answered Mr. Ravenstone. ‘What is his name?’

‘Harris. He is a lawyer, and a man of position and of considerable means. He is just opening a colliery too in our neighbourhood. I should have thought that he had his hands full.’

‘Oh! the children of this world are not only wiser, they are more active in their generation than the children of light. Wordly gain, and the fomenting of other men’s quarrels, and the stirring up of strife here to the hindrance of the Lord’s work—no doubt he will find time for it all! It is only where good is to be done and souls to be saved that we have “no time.”’

John Walrond did not answer. He was thinking of the charge that had been brought against this man, and wondering what view was taken of it over here. Wondering too what was the truth of the matter, and whether there could be indeed so dark a secret lying behind those fair, open features, and curious steel-grey eyes.

But he had little time to think of that, or anything else, outside the new life whose whirlpool speedily engulfed him. Mr. Ravenstone spared not his subordinates, though he did not work them so unmercifully as he did himself. And where the others rushed at their work with scanty preparation, speaking literally *extempore*, and got through it 'somehow,' John Walrond felt himself obliged to spend hours in anxious study and composition, and perhaps only got through it 'somehow' after all.

‘If you and the rest really believe what you say you believe, I wonder you don’t spend your lives in preaching at the street corners,’ Mr. Walrond had said. And that was the kind of life that Mr. Ravenstone and his fellow-workers had laid down for themselves ; a perpetual going out into the partings of the highways and compelling them to come in.

But it seemed a malignant Fate that had inoculated John Walrond, of all men, with the new ideas ; and had sent him out to the street corners—he who should, by inclination and temperament, have passed his life in a study settling the theological equivalent to the ‘doctrine of the enclitic D.’

Nature is fond of such contradictions, chaining men who were born heroes to some peaceful occupation, and flinging constitutional cowards into the foreground of

the battle, where they sometimes astonish the world and themselves by the deeds that are given them to do.

Perhaps Nature has the same liking for exotics that so many of us have, and likes to plant certain virtues in strange soil, and see what they will come to.

One night, very soon after his arrival in Colgrave, John Walrond had been very near a meeting that would have astonished him more than that glimpse of Thornton Harris.

He was hurrying to keep one of his evening engagements when he noticed that two men who were coming in the opposite direction stepped suddenly into a dark entry, as if to avoid him. He was by no means sure that they did not intend to rush out and bonnet him, or send him staggering into the road by a sudden push

as he passed by. Such playful little ways were not unknown among the roughs of Colgrave, as John Walrond's coadjutors could bear witness. His heart beat a little faster at the thought, more in fear of a loss of dignity than of anything else ; but none the less he went on.

His vicar would have gone boldly up to the entry, and have demanded to know the men's names, and what they were doing there ; but John's courage was not quite equal to that, or rather to facing the coarse laughter with which he would have expected to be answered. He simply walked steadily on, keeping to the other side of the pavement, and was glad to get past unmolested.

And, the instant he had gone by, Harold Malreward stepped out again into the lighted street, followed by a young gipsy,

his companion ; and together they hurried silently along, down the street, down one of the narrow lanes that led out of it, and into a still narrower and dirtier lane that lay beyond.

Harold had been leading till now, but here he drew back, and let the other act as guide. At the door of a mean little cottage near the end of the lane the guide knocked, and after a moment's pause and a whispered colloquy they were both admitted.

The man of whom they were in search was not immediately visible, having, in fact, excellent reasons for not interviewing strangers until fully convinced that they could mean him no harm, but after several messages conveyed to a nameless third party by a slipshod boy, a short, dark man appeared and asked Harold and his com-

panion to take a seat, sitting down at the same time himself with an air of being ready for business.

‘This is young Squire Malreward, Ned,’ said the gipsy. ‘At least, he calls himself Collingwood for the present. And he wants to see you.’

‘Anything private, sir?’ asked the man, briskly.

‘Very private. And you may drop the “sir,”’ answered Harold. ‘Jack! you may go. And just see that no one listens at the door while Mr. Coulson and I have our talk together.’

The young gipsy vanished, and Harold hardly waited for him to be gone.

‘Your name is Coulson?’ he asked.

‘It is—if you say so; though it’s not the name I go by now.’

‘Well! we’ll take it for granted you are

Ned Coulson. You will not object; for Ned Coulson has an opportunity of earning a nice little sum of money.'

'As how,—sir?'

'You will see. You know a Mr. Harris, I believe—a lawyer, who lives at Deerhurst? I have been told to ask you if you would like to pay him what you owe him?'

'Would I like it?' said the man, with a terrible oath. 'He shall see some day how willing I am to pay him! But who told you that?'

'Never mind! I know it, you see, and that's the main thing. Now! you may speak freely to me. I too owe Harris a debt that I should be glad to pay. And I believe that you can help me to pay him, and perhaps clear off your own score at the same time. Anyhow, it shall be made



worth your while. But I must know first how much you know of Mr. Harris.'

'He doesn't know much of *me* now! He believes I am dead these seven years. There are not many about here that do know me by the name of Coulson, but, being recommended as you are, I suppose I may speak out. I know this much of Mr. Harris, that I was a tenant of his once and he ruined me. He paid me the compliment, too, of taking a fancy to my wife: and she is with him now. It was she that came before the magistrates the other day, and bore witness for him—poor fool!'

The business-like calm with which he spoke seemed to make his story very incredible. Harold looked at him steadily from under half-closed lids, and said,

'Well?'

'She thinks he means to marry her—or

used to think so. It was for that she got me to depart this life, and whatever money she can scrape together she gives me now and then, to keep me from coming back to life again. It's his money, and I take it in part payment of what he has cheated me out of. As for what I owe him——!'

The man was not so calm as he professed to be, or rather it seemed that there was a dull fire of resentment smouldering beneath the upper crust of brutal indifference.

'Do you think she spoke the truth before the magistrates?' asked Harold, after a moment.

'No! She was a truth-speaking woman once, but since that devil has got hold of her he can make her do or say whatever he likes.'

'Could you find out the truth, do you

think?—find some means of proving that he did what I charged him with then?’

‘I could try, of course. But I doubt—everyone says he has the devil’s own luck. I thought you wanted him made an end of.’

Coulson looked disappointed as Harold shook his head. For the moment they both sat silent, and then he began to speak again in a still lower tone, bending a little nearer.

‘I’d do it if you’d give me what would get me out of the country and a little over to begin life with in Australia. I’d have done it long before, only a broken-down man can never get beforehand with the world enough for that. What is it but what he did for Crofton?—Ay! and for a better man than Crofton, for, if it hadn’t been for him, your own father, Squire Mal-

reward, would have been alive and well this day.'

'I know it,' said Harold, moodily, while his breath came a little faster. 'But what's done can never be undone, even by his death. Only, if I could clear my father's name, and see him hanged!'

'He'll never be hanged, he's too clever, and knows the law too well! But a man's hands round his throat might squeeze as hard as a rope; and if he were once dead some would speak out that will never dare to tell the truth while he lives.'

'Do you mean your wife?'

'Ay!—and others. Come!—if all tales are true he has harmed you as much as ever he did your father. Will you turn out—a beggar—while he gets richer every day, with his coal and his new estates, and rides over all our necks?'

‘ I must have my revenge, some way.  
But not by hiring a man to murder him.’

‘ It’s no more than he deserves ; no more than what I have always planned for him, when I could get some one to help me, and see my way a bit afterwards. If you’ll make it straight for me afterwards, I’ll undertake him alone, and there’ll be the less risk of anything coming out about your share in the matter, though the more danger for me. It will be but hastening matters, after all, for I have sworn by—you are gipsy enough to know what !—that he shall never die in his bed, and two or three of my wife’s folks have sworn with me.’

The dry, business-like tones, and the settled ferocity of his manner, made a strange and somewhat awful combination. It seemed as though his wrongs were now so old a story that they had ceased to ex-

cite him in the least, while hatred and fear and the desire of vengeance had become the mere commonplaces of life, but had grown stronger with the years.

Harold looked at him thoughtfully. He was likely to be a useful tool, but tools must not settle for themselves how they were to be used. That part of his nature which was uppermost just now found this man not uncongenial; but the other side of him—the Malreward side—had a share in the answer that he presently made.

‘I must be master in this business if I go into it at all. If I want the man killed I will do it myself, and see that he gets fair play. Meanwhile, I will pay you handsomely to find out all you can about him, and, if you can give me proofs of his being guilty of this murder, I will make your fortune.’

‘The only way to do that would be to persuade my wife to speak the truth,’ said Coulson, in his grim, dispassionate tone. ‘And that’s next to impossible, especially as she’d have to own to perjury. But I might try—I don’t see her myself, but Will Herne sometimes sees her for me—he who used to groom there. He might work upon her some way—women are such fools!’

‘You had better try, anyhow. And let me know in a few days if you have heard or done anything.’

‘Very well, sir. I’ll do my best. But I don’t promise to keep my hands off Harris, if a good chance should turn up—a safe one! I’ve been waiting for it more than nine years, and if it should come I can’t afford to lose it.’

‘Make your mind easy,’ answered Har-

old, with a smile that certainly would not have made Harris's mind easy if he had seen it. '*I* shan't have patience for nine years! And my chance may come before yours.'

'If it does—all right. And if I find out anything I'll let you hear of me, and where to find me, by one of the Hernes. I know them all, though I'm not one of them, and I reckon they all know you. But you won't meet me about this place by daylight much.'

Harold assented, and was about to call his gipsy companion and take his leave, when the other spoke again, as if by a sudden impulse.

'I beg your pardon, sir. Did I understand that young chap to say you were calling yourself Collingwood?'

'Yes! That is my name, I believe!'



‘Ah! I knew your mother when she was Mrs. Collingwood. A handsome lady she was, and a great deal too good for her husband. He was a friend of Sam Crofton and Lawyer Harris, and it was just like to like. I don’t know where he met her, nor where he lived, but they must have been married when she was quite a child, and now and again he used to bring her to stay at Crofton’s. I was about the place then, and knew all about it. They said Harris made up to her, and she’d have nothing to say to him, though she’d little reason to be fond of her husband.’

Harold was standing with his face turned away from the light, listening with breathless interest. He did not believe that any revelations could now make any difference to him personally: but he had never before heard so much concerning his mother’s

lot before she had become his father's wife.

‘Harris looked higher than such as my wife in those days, you see!’ went on Coulson. ‘He wanted a lady, and wanted her all the more because she was married. But I believe he did come after her again—after her husband had gone away and left her, and was thought to be dead. Do you believe this tale about his having been alive after all when she married your father?’

‘I suppose so. The lawyers seem to think it can be proved.’

‘Ah, well! They don’t know Harris as well as I do. If I heard him swear that the earth was round, I should begin to believe it was square. And I knew Collingwood too; and nothing will ever persuade me that love, or money, or pity, or anything else would have stopped him, if

he'd been alive, from turning up at Crucis to fetch his wife away or to break her heart. He hated her because she was too good for him, and he hated your father too. They never met but once, that I know of, at Crofton's, and then Squire Malreward either knocked him down, or threatened to, for the way he behaved to the ladies when he was half drunk.'

Coulson paused, but Harold could not trust himself to speak. His heart was hot within him, yearning with pity over his dead mother's memory, and full of wrath at her wrongs. So it was her cause too that he would champion in striking at Harris,—an insult of five-and-twenty years ago that was waiting still to be avenged. But he felt that he must get away and think of it by himself, while Coulson seemed to have exhausted his stream of

reminiscences. And, as for his doubts of the truth of Harris's last story, they meant nothing after all. As the man himself said, he would not believe even the most obvious fact if Harris asserted it, but since the rest of the world did not quite share his feeling, Harris's assertions were none the less likely to have their practical effect on the future, when backed by such evidence as he had already brought forward.

Briefly, therefore, Harold took his leave of his new friend, and went out into the night, with plenty to think of besides his own half-formed schemes and hopes that were akin to despair.

Meanwhile, at Alston Crucis, his sudden disappearance had caused more dismay and perplexity than he had at all expected or intended.

On the first day of his absence his aunts and step-mother had looked upon it merely as a freak. In their isolation they had not heard of the charge against Harris, and its unfortunate results, until Harold himself had told them, the day before he left home. And, though he spoke plainly enough, the calm with which he spoke had given them somehow a wrong impression. They looked upon that part of the story which related to Squire Philip's first marriage and Harold's inheritance as a mere malicious figment of the lawyer's, on a par with the hint of a prosecution for conspiracy thrown out by the magistrates. They were distressed and annoyed by it; but it never occurred to them that, to the world outside, it meant a 'likely story enough,' and for Harold the near approach of something very like annihilation.

When, the next day, they found he had gone, they hardly, even then, connected his disappearance with this strange rumour. Harold had always been somewhat lawless and unaccountable, even in his father's time, and it did not much surprise them that, now he was his own master, he should go and come in a mysterious fashion without consulting them.

But the next day brought over Mr. Bolingbroke to tell his tale, and to explain to his sister the possible alteration in her son's position.

He took a very different view, and his consternation affected the three women, who began to wonder that they had not felt more uneasy before. Half angry he was, and yet more dismayed, vexed with Harold for not having stayed to fight out the battle, even if it were a losing one, and

yet realising to a certain extent what his state of mind must be, and very anxious as to where he had gone, and what he had done with himself.

On that point no one could give him any information. Harold was gone, but no one had seen him go, and no one had heard him say one word as to his plans and intentions. Mr. Bolingbroke recalled something desperate in the look of the young man's face, and a certain reckless unreality in the tone in which he had spoken of the future, and shivered at the suggestion of a very dark thought indeed. But he would not on any account have had it occur to his sister or to her sisters-in-law, and indeed they were becoming quite sufficiently distressed without that.

The Miss Malrewards were, perhaps, just beginning to realise how fond they were,

after all, of their dead brother's favourite son, the lad who had grown up with them, and who had been, in his own wild way, always courteous and kind. Perhaps their consciences now accused them of many little sins of omission towards him, and, if so, Mrs. Philip Malreward's could hardly have been silent. She could not fail to remember that at least her step-son had never made life hard to her in any way, as he easily might have done; and that he had been more tender and loving to her boy than ever she had been to him. To do her justice, her voice was the first to say that the story could not be true, and to hope most fervently that Phil might never be the owner of Alston Crucis. It could not be true, they all agreed, looking anxiously in Mr. Bolingbroke's face; but all the while each found herself thinking



remorsefully of Harold, as she might have done if he had been dead or gone away for ever. He *had been* this—or that—that was kind and generous. But where was he now? Somehow or other, it came out that old Mrs. Malreward was the last person who had seen him on the night before he vanished; and, on hearing that, Mr. Bolingbroke asked to see her, and all three ladies accompanied him to her domain. An ill-judged proceeding, for the old sibyl always resented the intrusion of too many strangers at once, and of late years had never regarded her daughters as anything but strangers.

She would not admit that she knew anything of her grandson's movements. How should a poor old woman, who never moved out of her chair, know anything?

But, all the while, she surveyed them

with a mocking, inscrutable, yet bitter smile, that said so plainly, 'I could an I would!' that Mr. Bolingbroke lost patience.

'Alice!' he said, aside, to his sister, 'if you and the Miss Malrewards will leave me alone with her, I might be able to get something out of her.'

In a minute or two more they were left alone together, and he drew a little nearer, while she lifted her head and looked at him with those strange eyes, over whose brightness she seemed purposely to draw a veil.

'If you know anything,' he said, bluntly, 'why will you not tell me? I assure you that I mean to be your grandson's friend.'

'I know you!' she said, with an odd little smile. 'I daresay you mean him no harm. But you are on the other side,—

you can't help that. You were born so ; and, as you are born, so you are. I know you Bolingbrokes !—your father and grandfather before you.'

' I blame him for having gone away, but I am anxious about him. There are reasons for anxiety that you hardly seem to understand. Don't you see that it is possible that, in desperation,—and, poor fellow, he has every reason to be desperate !—he may have made away with himself ?'

Mr. Bolingbroke blamed himself for speaking so plainly, yet for the moment was too much irritated to spare her. But she only smiled in a witch-like fashion, and nodded, undismayed.

' No !' she said, with so confident a look that her questioner answered eagerly.

' I hope not, heaven knows ! But what makes you think not ?'

‘He is one of our folks, and we are not such fools! No Rom ever gave up the game before it was lost, that fashion.’

Mr. Bolingbroke got up and turned away impatiently. He too had not forgotten for a moment the strange blood that ran in Harold’s veins, but the thought of it gave him less satisfaction. After two steps he came back again.

‘Did he say nothing to you, then, about his movements and intentions?’

‘He said nothing. But I know what I know, and I will not tell you. He is one of us,—he wants no help, and you will hear of him again before long.’

She turned to the fire, and closed her lips, like Odin’s unwilling prophetess; and Mr. Bolingbroke was fain, however reluctantly, to leave her to herself.

Phil had been out of the house during

all the discussion and inquiry, and, though he had heard before enough to wonder over, he knew but little of the story his uncle had come to tell. That night, however, his mother thought best to tell him all that they had heard.

He took it with outward indignation and disbelief, but with secret tears, of which he need not have been so much ashamed. It was easy to refuse utterly to believe the story; easier still to resolve, if it should be true, to give up land and money to Harold as soon as ever he himself should be of age to manage his own affairs. But would Harold take it, and where was he? And what was life worth, here in ease and comfort, while Harold was an exile from the home that should be his, and perhaps had not even enough to eat, or a roof to cover him?

Days went on and the story became public property,—Thornton Harris took care of that,—and Phil found a change in most people's manner towards him.

Some, including some of the oldest servants of the family, were a little less kindly than before: and the boy loved them the better for it. But more could not help showing that they regarded him as having vastly increased in importance of late. And Phil remembered it against them, and developed a certain amount of youthful cynicism.

He moped about at home, and longed for the time when he should go back to school. Alston Crucis had lost all interest for him now that it was no longer Harold's, though it might possibly be his own! And though he could not confide in mother, or uncle, or aunts, Phil was quite ready and anxious

to confide in his own special chum among his school-fellows ; and to ask his sage advice and assistance in arranging some hare-brained scheme for hunting for Harold, to the world's end and beyond it.

## CHAPTER VI.

## A WEATHER-BREEDER.

Can I love thee, my beloved, can I love thee ?  
And is this like love, to stand  
With no comfort in my hand,  
When strong as Death I fain would watch above thee ?  
E. BARRETT BROWNING.

MR. WALROND, along with a few other fine, old-fashioned prejudices, cherished one against railways, which, indeed, were still something of an innovation in his day. He was quite prepared to think them a good thing for the country : but for himself he never used them if he could help it. What did Providence create horses for ?



Naturally, therefore, it seemed an easy matter to drive twenty miles into Colgrave, to see how John was getting on ; and if Queen Bess liked to brave the cold and come along, so much the better.

Elizabeth was quite willing to accompany her father, being a hardy young woman and used to long drives and rough country roads. And she was rewarded by a lovely day, a balmy foretaste of the spring that was already on its way ; such a day as in those latitudes they call a ‘weather-breeder,’ and after which they ‘look out for squalls.’

Weather-breeders are very blissful while they last ; all the more so because of the thought of what is coming, and Elizabeth sat up in the high dog-cart by her father’s side, in a very contented frame of mind.

She was still young enough for every

little expedition to be a going-forth to meet the unknown : and the quiet and seclusion of Deerhurst had weighed upon her a little of late—though she hardly knew the reason, or how much her heart had wandered from her into unknown regions, with one who might be anywhere, and of whom no one spoke.

She fancied that if she only knew more she could be quite happy; if only she could be sure that something terrible had not happened of which she had not heard.

In any mood, at any hour of the day, if Elizabeth's fairy godmother had appeared and offered her a wish, she would have answered, 'Tell me where Harold Malreward is, and what he is doing.' And if, beyond that, the elf had generously offered her another, she would have said, colouring

and hesitating, 'Let me find some way to help him—if only a word to say!'

That was all. She would have laughed in genuine amusement if anyone had suggested that she wished him to think of her. Why should he, struggling in the deep waters, think of one little insignificant person safe on shore? What did it matter about her?

And it never struck her that there was anything strange or ominous in this centring of all her thoughts and interests on one who six months ago had been a stranger. Nor did it occur to her to ask herself what her life would look like if Harold Malreward, prosperous or otherwise, passed away out of it, and came back no more.

In spite of secret anxieties, she could chatter gaily enough to her father, as they

drove on through the picturesque undulating country, with a gaiety that was quite sincere and real. The sky was blue and smiling in the halcyon weather, but the landscape did not smile—except as dead lips do—spring being still so far away across the southern hills. There was little to remind one of how the wind had howled, and the snow had driven over these very fields little more than a week ago. But Elizabeth remembered it, with the compassionate thought of all wanderers, and a tender pang at the remembrance of one.

‘We must certainly go first to the inn, and get some lunch,’ said Mr. Walrond, as the end of their journey began to loom in sight. ‘I never told John we were coming, and I am far too hungry to trust to his landlady’s tender mercies. I daresay she feeds him on a single chop or a morsel of

shoe-leather which she calls a steak. They all do, without better looking-after than John is capable of.'

'Poor John! I hope she doesn't,' said his sister.

'He won't know the difference, but I do. And I have business at another place besides, so we'll drive through the town and take it on our way, and then go to the "Star." Hallo! what's going on here?'

The market-place and little main street of Colgrave were choked by a noisy but apparently good-humoured crowd, shouting and singing, waving gaily-coloured flags of an improvised appearance, and brandishing certain homely articles set up on poles, whose emblematic meaning one must have been brought up in the midst of local politics to understand.

'I am an idiot!' said Mr. Walrond. 'I

forgot that the election rows would begin to-day. No getting to the "Star" this way. We must go up Weaver Street, and round by the church, and I can get to Raymond's office through the passage.'

The mare was obviously relieved to turn away from the crowd and their vagaries, which she would never have tolerated even so far if the mischief had not been taken out of her by twenty miles of rough road. They dashed up the comparatively quiet side street, round the 'church-corner,' and drew up before the opening of the narrow passage that led back by tortuous ways to the High Street.

'James, go to her head,' said Mr. Walrond, preparing to get out. 'Now, Bess, are you afraid to be left here while I get across to Raymond's? You may come with me, and I'll drop you at the "Star,"

if you like ; but perhaps I'd better see first if it is in a state to take us in.'

'Oh, thanks, I'd rather stay here. I almost wish the crowd would come this way. I want to see what wonderful things they were carrying.'

Mr. Walrond shook his head and departed, while James scrambled down from the back and posted himself by the mare's shoulder, looking somewhat longingly at the bran-new Radical hotel, a little farther down the road, a far grander-looking building than the homely and Conservative 'Star,' which always enjoyed the honour of his master's patronage when he came to Colgrave.

Elizabeth drew her furs closer round her, and watched the shifting groups at the end of the street, coming and going, forming and re-forming, but all looking down towards the market-place.

Colgrave was not a lively town as a general rule, but it was the centre of a large district, besides being now the headquarters of a vast and shifting population of new-comers, so that it could muster its thousands on an emergency. The scattered groups at the end of Church Street began to extend all down its length, gathering every moment, and the shouting, which had seemed to die away as they turned the corner, grew each instant nearer and louder.

In an instant more it was plain to Elizabeth that her rash wish was to be realised, and that the mob was coming that way. She minded little enough on her own account, but she knew that her father would dislike it for her. But if they fled before the oncoming tide, where could they go, or how would Mr. Walrond know where to find them?



Whether or not it would have been wise for them to fly, a moment's hesitation had rendered it impossible, or nearly so. The street was blocked at either end, for the flood seemed to be setting both ways; and the mare was far too fidgety for any but her master to attempt to steer her through such a crowd. James hung on to her head and prepared himself for the worst; and Elizabeth looked about her with much interest, quite ready to enjoy the scene now that she was in for it.

The crowd was rough and noisy enough, but Elizabeth, being the fellow-country-woman of the bawling units in that uproarious mass, was able to perceive that they were quite in good humour, though a stranger might have doubted it. They were pushing, but not hurting one another; chaffing, but not abusing each other; and

some of the quick turns of repartee that reached Elizabeth's ears amused her more than she cared to show.

For a few moments she wondered what had brought them down that street, until presently, following the direction of hundreds of eyes, she perceived the centre of attraction on the balcony of the Liberal hotel.

Somebody was going to make a speech ; presumably the Radical candidate, judging by the cries of his supporters, and the colours waved upon their impromptu standards.

He stood upon the square, open balcony on the top of the wide porch that reached across the pavement—not a bad place from which to address a street audience—and behind him stood a little group of his friends and supporters. Elizabeth was not

near enough to hear all that he said, though he spoke at the full stretch of his not very powerful lungs ; but she had long sight, and she could see the speaker and his companions pretty clearly.

And one face in that little group startled her, and made her look again. Thornton Harris ! What was he doing here ? She knew of no harm that his presence here could do to Harold, and indeed Harold might be far enough away by this time ; and yet it gave her a thrill of fear to see him there, as if he had added ubiquity to the other qualities for which men feared him.

The speech had begun, and a deathlike stillness fell upon the crowded street. Those who were too far off to hear had not yet discovered the fact, and were straining their ears and holding their breath.

Something, perhaps the sudden hush, brought to Elizabeth's mind Deerhurst Church on a rainy Sunday morning, and Harold Malreward's dark head towering above the rustic congregation ; and certain kindly pitying thoughts that had stolen into her heart then, and had never been absent from it since.

And she turned her head—and he was there ; standing among the crowd, not ten paces away from her.

His back was towards her ; she could only see the back of his head, and the curve of one dusky cheek. But she was sure of him, though more perhaps by instinct than by sight ; and her pulses quickened, with an emotion that she would not have confessed even to herself.

He was not dressed like a gentleman, nor yet altogether like a working-man.

Indeed, if Elizabeth had known it, this was the costume of a tolerably prosperous gipsy ; not like the rags in which he had come that night to Deerhurst, but having a distinct though indescribable character of its own.

Motionless he stood there, in the crowd but not of it, with looks that never wavered for an instant, fixed upon that group on the balcony.

He was as far from it as Elizabeth was herself ; but she would not have presumed to say that he could not hear, remembering one or two trifling incidents in the past.

Certainly he could see ; and something in the still intentness of his attitude frightened her, it so plainly meant something.

If the fairy godmother had had a hand in bringing about this meeting, she had not done her work very thoroughly, after

all. Harold was there, indeed, within a few yards of her ; but he might almost as well have been miles away—or so it seemed. He must have seen her, Elizabeth thought, seated there in that high dog-cart above the heads of the crowd. But he never turned his head, his whole attention was riveted on that balcony yonder. And any moment Mr. Walrond might come back, or an eddy of the crowd might sweep him away.

Was this the meeting that she had planned and dreamed of so often ? Away there in the still country lane, when the crisis of the tragedy was but just beginning, he had told her more than he had told to any other. ‘ You are helping me not to repent,’ he had said, and her heart had throbbed with mingled pain and pleasure and pride.

Now, had the tide of trouble swept them so far apart that he did not even care to speak to her? The tears sprang to her eyes, and seemed to sting them, and she clenched her teeth upon her lower lip because it quivered.

‘What does it matter?’ she said to herself, defiantly, ‘I am his friend still, even if he has forgotten me. I should like to tell him so. But this is what friendship means for a woman—to sit here and say nothing, and perhaps never see him again!’

In truth, it did seem as though there was nothing else to be done! She could not call him by his name there in that crowd, though if she had raised her voice ever so little he could have heard her. Certainly he would not wish that name to be known, which possibly was not even

his own ; and she did not know what else to call him.

James had more than enough to do to hold the mare, who was fretting and fidgeting as the crowd pressed closer around her. It was not possible to send him away, even had it been desirable, and as for venturing down herself into the throng, though in one sense Elizabeth had courage enough for it, in another she had not. She could not face Harold's look of surprise when she would have to call his attention to herself. She could not face her father's look of stern displeasure if he should return and find his daughter struggling through a press of unwashed colliers and navvies something less than sober.

She could only sit still, and drive the tears back to their source, and bite her lips till they ceased quivering, tasting, for the



first time in her joyous girlhood, woman's bitter cup of passion and impotence, the travail pang of immortal love, that many waters cannot quench nor the floods drown, but that yet is as helpless as any other babe new-born.

And presently, that is to say in a space of time that was really very short, though it seemed long to her, matters began to work round, as they often do, from an unlikely and unpromising beginning, and in an equally unlikely way.

It had begun to dawn upon those on the outskirts of the throng that, wedged as they were in the narrow street, no pushing or struggling would bring them much nearer to the denser mass that by sheer *vis inertiae* maintained its position near the portico of the hotel, and also that, being where they were, most of them could not

hear a word, or at any rate not words enough to piece together intelligibly. Therefore, being still in a good humour, they began, with commendable philosophy, to extract what amusement they could from their surroundings, until such time as the speech should be over and the tumultuous procession free to get under way again.

In her prominent position it was of course not long before Elizabeth attracted their attention, and became the subject of their outspoken comments.

‘Sithee! lad, there’s a gradely lass sits up yonder,’ remarked a collier from the north. ‘Looks a bit lonesome too, wi’hout a lad to sit at t’ side of her.’

‘So she do!’ said the individual addressed, who was well past middle age. ‘You’d best offer for t’ post. I’d apply

myself, only my old missus is none so far off !'

'Nay, I'm none so much for t' lasses ! There's Tom, yonder. Here ! Tom, lad ! There's a bonny lass, as her sweetheart's gone and left her !'

'Tom,' thus apostrophised, was not, as far as appearance went, a promising squire of dames. He was an ugly, under-sized little man, whose holiday clothes were several sizes too big for him. As he wriggled himself through the crowd, however, the confident smile upon his face was as conspicuous as the gay-coloured handkerchief round his neck. It waned a little, though, as he looked up, directed by his companion's mischievous glances, and saw Elizabeth's fair abstracted face, lily-like above her dark wrappings, looking away above the heads of the crowd.

The others, who would not for a good deal have spoken to the young lady themselves, assailed their comrade with a volley of chaff.

‘Go it, Tom!’ ‘There’s a nice seat waiting for thee up there, lad.’ ‘Tom’s turned modest!’ ‘Now then! Tom, it’s a shame to see a pretty lass like that and ne’er a lad that’s man enough to pay her a bit of attention!’

If the redoubtable Tom had been perfectly sober he would have given his mates as good as they gave, and not have dreamed of addressing Elizabeth otherwise than by loud asides meant to express gallantry and admiration. But, being in a somewhat bemused state of mind, he perhaps really thought that his attentions might be flattering, even if not accepted.

‘Eh! missis,’ he said, advancing to the

steps of the dog-cart, 'I wish I was up there along o' yo'.'

Elizabeth had been too much absorbed in her own thoughts to heed the comments of her noisy admirers; but at this direct address she looked down, without saying anything, and just swept with a glance the leering, amatory, and yet not altogether insolent face upturned to hers.

Those clear grave eyes, to which troubled thoughts had given an unconscious dignity, somewhat disconcerted the gallant Tom. He drew back a little, hiding his discomfiture with a laugh, and the matter might have ended, if James had not taken upon himself to interfere, in that tone of infinite superiority which only a gentleman's man can assume. He was still holding on to the mare, who was now trying to back, and was besides so jammed

in the crowd that half-a-dozen burly forms intervened between him and his young mistress ; therefore, he considered himself bound to throw all the more authority into his tone, to make up for his practical helplessness.

‘Now then!’ he cried, ‘none of your incivility, if you please, or you’ll get yourself into trouble.’

‘Mates ! is there a bobby coming along? This heer chap’s going to give me in charge!’ cried Tom, in accents of feigned alarm. ‘Nay ! he’s got his hands pretty full, I think I’ll take my chance,’ he added, nodding defiance at the indignant James, and actually putting one foot on the step of the dog-cart. ‘Come ! missis, you’ve room for a little ’un up theer, hanna yo’?’

He looked up with a face full of laughing impudence, holding on to the carriage

with both hands, as if ready to swing himself up to the seat he pretended to covet.

Elizabeth was too much a woman of her world to be frightened; but she flushed deeply with annoyance, and shrank back a little. Whether her bold admirer would really have seated himself by her side may be doubted, but before he had had time to do so, and before James had made up his mind to leave the mare to do her worst, a pair of strong hands had plucked Tom off the step and held him for an instant dangling.

‘Now, then, my man!’ said a voice that she knew well. ‘You’re not a fool, I believe, so don’t act like one. Be off now about your business.’

The gallant devotee of the fair sex found himself launched into the press, cleaving it like a wedge, and staggering several

paces before he contrived to find his feet again. The crowd closed round him, ungenerously rejoicing over his defeat, and at that moment a new speaker, with the voice of a Bull of Bashan, came to the front of the balcony, and drew all eyes by the roar with which he began.

And Harold stood by the step of the dog-cart, looking up at Elizabeth's startled face, full of agitation which, if he had but known it, was due far more to his sudden intervention than to what he had saved her from.

'Miss Walrond, I am so sorry,' he said, simply. 'I ought to have come before. But I did not see you till this instant.'

'I thought you always saw everything,' said Elizabeth, feeling, like Enid, 'blunt and stupid.' 'I saw you ten minutes ago.'

'I was—listening,' with a glance towards



the throne of eloquence on the balcony.

‘Are you all alone? Where is Mr. Walrond?’

‘Gone down that passage. I expected him back before this.’

‘Don’t be afraid. I will stay with you till he comes back, if you will let me?’

‘You are very good.’

‘Am I?’ he said, with a quick smile that, somehow, was inexpressibly sad.

‘Would you say that, if you knew I was glad that you should get into a little difficulty, and need me?’

‘I don’t know. I wanted to see you,’ she answered, frankly. ‘But you had only to come to see us, if you wished, and I think you ought to have come.’

For a moment he did not answer, looking at her half-abstractedly, with a little contraction of the brows. You may see

just that look on the face of a man in mortal pain, who hears without heeding, almost without understanding, the encouraging words they speak to him.

‘Why are you here?’ went on Elizabeth, gathering all her courage, spurred by the fear that this might be her last chance, and by the hope that the chance had been ‘sent,’ and not for nothing. ‘Everyone is asking after you—everyone wants only to know the truth, and to help you if things are as you feared. Have you forgotten all your old friends? Why should you be here, and dressed like this?’

‘I dress as what I am! I am not masquerading now, as when I came to your house that night, and you found me out so easily. And I have gone to the only friends I have any right to—older friends than “the county” can furnish.’

‘Do you mean——’

‘Yes, you know who I mean. While I was rich they would cheat me as gladly as any other rich man, but they will be true to me now.’

‘Other friends would be true to you, if you would let them.’

‘I never doubted them. But they cannot help me to what I want as these old friends will.’

‘Help you?’

‘Yes! I told you that I had no more place here than if I were dead, but I must haunt this neighbourhood like any other ghost till I have done what I have to do; and then I shall vanish, and trouble no one any more.’

‘Will you not tell me what it is that you want?’

‘I think not. It would only vex you.’

You would call it wrong; and I should have nothing to say.'

Involuntarily he glanced towards the balcony, while his face darkened; and a quick intuition told Elizabeth what he meant.

'That man,' she said. 'It has to do with him!—Not revenge? You would not lower yourself to that?'

'Would I not? You don't know!' answered Harold, bitterly. '*Can* I lower myself—now; or what else have I to do in the world?'

He had not taken his eyes from that one figure in the little group of speechmakers, and Elizabeth shivered as she read the meaning in them. It is always something of a shock to a woman to realise the strength of a master-passion in a man, especially if that passion be hate.

But sometimes a woman is roused to fight for her ideal as she might for her child, and in the strength of that divine *storgë* she will lack neither wit nor courage.

‘Why should you ask?’ she said. ‘Do you think you are really lowered by anything that has happened yet?’

‘I don’t want to discuss it,’ he answered, almost impatiently. ‘I told you I should only grieve and vex you. I have no name to disgrace, no kith or kin that will be shocked at my doings. Let me act watchdog till your father comes back, and then I will disappear and not vex you any more.’

‘Would you fight that man with his own weapons, then? sink yourself to his level?’

‘I wanted justice. And a fool and a knave between them cheated me out of it. Now I will have revenge, and no one shall

cheat me out of that. But it will be justice, still.'

'Will you not tell my father what you mean to do, and let him judge between you and your enemy?'

'No! he would be in duty bound to decide against me, and why should I trouble him to no purpose?'

She did not answer. A sense of failure stung her to the quick, and she knew that her voice was no longer under her control.

Whatever came of it she must not break down, there in the open street, with her father perhaps close at hand, and it needed all her energies to struggle with the tears that, in spite of all her efforts, brimmed over and fell.

As they fell, Harold looked up suddenly and saw them.

'Ah! don't,' he said, in a very different

tone, coming a step nearer. 'Elizabeth! my dear little playfellow of old times, I wish you would not care.'

'I was foolish enough to make a hero of you, you see!' she answered, indignantly brushing the dew from her lashes. 'I was proud to think of your victory. It made me glad to have known anyone who could fight such a battle, and win. And now you will let yourself be beaten, after all! Oh! if I were in your place!'

The soft grey eyes that looked down upon Harold were full of fire, almost of scorn. And yet perhaps he read in them a hint of something else, something that she little dreamed was written there.

'If you had been in some one else's place, it would have been more to the purpose!' he said, half to himself, with a little start.

A roar of laughter broke from the crowd at some broad joke of the loud-voiced speaker, who still held all eyes and ears. Elizabeth had not caught Harold's words, and would not have understood if she had heard them. But he stood still looking up at her with a startled expression, as if she had just told him a secret.

If she had been in Alicia's place—this child as he had almost thought her! Or if Alicia had been woman enough to bid him do right at all risks, to rejoice in his self-sacrifice!

Almost for the first time since he had hardened his heart and refused the parting kiss from those lovely lips, Harold looked back, and let himself feel what might have been. And, in spite of the pang it brought, his face softened; so that Elizabeth, watching him, grew bold with a thought that suddenly came to her.



‘ You said that you owed me something, that you would always be thankful to me because of that night,’ she began, in soft, hurried tones. ‘ Well! I hold you to it! Will you promise me something, if I ask you?’

‘ If it is anything that I can do. But not to give up——’

‘ I won’t ask that! But when it is all over,—when you have done what you want to do, and had your revenge,—you shall see me once more, and tell me about it.’

‘ No! You don’t know what you are asking! Do you think I could tell you of such things, or that you would care to hear?’

He spoke hastily and with a frown, but those bent black brows did not frighten Elizabeth.

‘ You only want justice, you know,’ she said, almost triumphantly. ‘ What is fit

justice for you to take, cannot be very unfit for me to hear of, and I shall have no right to blame you. You have promised, and I hold you to it.'

'You want to make me ashamed!' answered Harold, looking exceedingly angry and exceedingly loth. 'And I don't know why I should care. By that time a little more shame will not matter much.'

'Promise me, then. And shake hands upon it.'

She drew her hand from its thick glove, and leaned down from her high perch. Few would have thought, looking at their two faces—his, dark and immovable, hers, with every delicate line quivering between command and entreaty—that her will was for the moment the stronger.

But nevertheless he yielded, like one overborne.

‘I promise,’ he answered, almost sullenly, and their hands met.

And a round of applause at that instant broke from the crowd, as the last speaker wound up with a magnificent peroration, and with bows and smiles the little group of politicians withdrew from the balcony and disappeared through the window of the hotel. Last of all Thornton Harris followed the rest, and, as Elizabeth looked up and saw him go, it seemed to her that he lingered an instant, turning his face their way. Did he see them and know them? What did it matter if he did; had he not done his worst already?

It seemed as if the floodgates at the other end of the street were opened, and the crowd flowed away in that direction, and ebbed until the space all round them was left almost deserted.

‘ You have been very good to stay with me so long,’ said Elizabeth, simply. ‘ No one will molest me now. And if you really don’t mean to speak to my father and let him advise you, you had better go now before he comes.’

‘ Perhaps it would be better, if one could be sure those fellows would not come this way again.’

‘ They will not, I think. And my father must be here directly. I shall tell him that I have seen you, and that we are certainly to see you again, whether you go or stay.’

‘ You speak as if it would be easy,’ said Harold, rather bitterly ; ‘ you forget that your father is a magistrate, and that I have appealed to the law in vain. Suppose I come to you with the police after me, having been driven to break the law ?’

‘What you can answer to God and your own conscience you can very well answer to us, who are your friends. So it is only good-bye for the present.’

Again her eyes said more than her lips would utter. And looking into them Harold wondered how he should face them with such a tale as he should have to tell, and knew that he must face them for his promise’ sake.

‘Good-bye,’ he answered, lingeringly, looking up and down the street to make sure that none of the few remaining stragglers looked likely to make themselves obtrusive or unpleasant. Chivalrous consideration for his child-playfellow’s safety was uppermost for the moment, and beneath that a feeling of irritation. ‘Why was I fool enough to make you such a promise?’ And undermost of all, hardly recognised,

the echo of that thought, 'If you had been in some one else's place!'

A quick step on the flags of the passage caught Elizabeth's ear, and she turned her head, to see her father hurrying down it with long impatient strides. Glancing round again, she saw to her surprise that Harold was gone,—already out of sight,—while James, tentatively caressing the nose of the impatient mare, had apparently not even seen him go.

To Elizabeth the rest of the day passed on somewhat like a dream, in which she played her part somehow, but with an odd sense of unreality. Her father's vituperations of the various individuals who had so long kept him waiting one after another, their lunch together at the 'Star,' John's neat, precise, little lodging, his sober delight at seeing them, and his equally precise account of

himself and his doings, the long drive home beside her father, with James so close behind them that she dared not begin to talk of what was nearest her heart ; all these went by, only realised, as it were, with half her consciousness, while the other half was busy elsewhere.

Mr. Waldron took her abstraction for weariness, and ordered her off to bed, without giving her time for explanation that night. And she went without protest, not unwilling to take time to understand herself a little better before telling her story or Harold's.

But she lay long awake in that little room above the porch where she had listened once for Harold to make his escape ; listening now to the wind that moaned and shrieked around the old house, and the rain that sobbed at her casement.

The halcyon day had proved its right to the name that the wisdom of the countryside had given it, and the storm was come already.

And to Elizabeth, now looking first into her own heart, its veil of innocent ignorance rent aside, it seemed that her halcyon days were over too.



## CHAPTER VII.

## THE TUG OF WAR.

And therefore him I except of all men, for may I once meet with him the one of us shall make an end of other, I make mine avow !

*Morte d'Arthur.*

THAT night, while Elizabeth lay awake in her little white bed thinking of Harold, and having, before she went to rest, 'set his graceless name in her pure prayer,' the young man himself was pacing Colgrave streets with restless, untiring steps, thinking many thoughts in which she had small share. Indeed, if he had been

asked, he would have said that his late experience had at any rate delivered him, for the rest of his life, from the snare of allowing any woman too large a share of his thoughts. And, what was more, he had matters on hand just then that would for the time have driven even Alicia out of his head, supposing her to have been still kind and true. But, when phrenologists get into difficulties over the various developments of the human brain, they tell us that there is a difference in the quality as well as in the size of those all-important convolutions. So perhaps a little thought, thrust down, kept out of sight by a score of more busy and importunate ones, may be of more potent and enduring quality than them all.

For good or for evil, Harold could not forget a promise, and his word passed to

Elizabeth brought in her image sometimes where that gracious apparition seemed somewhat out of place. Busy enough he was, maturing certain schemes which he would not have given up if Alicia herself had promised him—on that condition—all that he had ever hoped for from her. But he could not forget that some day it would be necessary to see those schemes, or at any rate the result of them, in the light of a certain pair of grey eyes that had ‘once’ looked upon him as a hero.

It happens often enough that a woman makes a cynic of a man who was once at peace with all the world. And sometimes, though less often, when a man has had an unforgivable blow from the hand he loved best in the world, he cynically forgives any or all of the other hard knocks that he may have come in for. ‘If she could fail

him, what in heaven's name are these others that they should be blamed for acting after their kind ?'

So when Alicia's desertion put the coping-stone on his misfortunes, Harold, in a certain way, forgave his wild kindred the deceit they had practised on him. The notion of casting in his lot with theirs for a time was congenial alike to his despair and his longing for revenge. He knew that, 'though small their pleasure to do good,' they would not be at all averse to assist him to do harm, provided it could be done with safety. And also, to do them justice, that they would be more likely to be true to him, now that he was poor and in reality one of themselves, than they had been before.

Harold's first proceeding, then, was to seek out the headquarters of the tribe, and

to overpower his uncle and the only two others of the family who had been in Joe Herne's secret with eloquent reproach and objurgation. He asked after Joe himself and Will, but they seemed to have disappeared and to be keeping their whereabouts a secret from the rest of the tribe. Harold could guess that their welcome, if they had returned, would probably have been of the coldest, nor did he himself care much to see them, knowing of nothing that he could do for them or they for him. Coulson, from what his grandmother had said, seemed his most promising ally, and, after having seen and enlisted him, he wandered about the country, himself looking out for shreds of information, sometimes with the tribe, but oftener alone, though always keeping up communication with them.

He found many of the younger gipsies

ready to take his part, some from a feeling that Gabriel Herne, their former leader, had behaved badly in trying to keep to himself the secret and all the profits likely to accrue therefrom, and some from an unspoken conviction that the *ci-devant* 'young squire' must have money, or at any rate powerful friends, in the background, and would be in a position to reward those who helped him. Perhaps there were some who honestly sympathised with one fallen from such high estate, who took his bitter cup with such unflinching courage; some who felt an honest wrath against the man who had killed and taken possession, who had robbed the dead and flaunted his ill-gotten gains amongst honest men. If there were such, they were likely to be faithful and obedient friends in their own lawless fashion, but the intelligent reader is not

asked to believe in them. We are accustomed to hear nowadays that the lowest motives are the only probable ones, though facts now and then rise up and give that theory the lie.

Be that as it may, Harold had no lack of shifty and unscrupulous allies, who were willing to watch Thornton Harris's movements, thwart his schemes, and, if necessary, defy the law of which he was so distinguished a representative, and who would—some of them, at any rate—have willingly done for him what they believed him to have done for Sam Crofton.

But it was not Harold's intention that they should do so, any more than Ned Coulson. If any hand was to be laid on Thornton Harris, it should be his own. Meanwhile, he had still sometimes a wild hope of keeping his vow, and clearing the

good old name that was no longer his. With the feeling that they owed this to him he could bring himself to see them all again,—Phil and the rest. Strictly speaking, of course it was now Mr. Bolingbroke's business, as the brother-in-law of the late Philip Malreward and the uncle and trustee of the present. But Mr. Bolingbroke would never be eager and unscrupulous enough to deal with Thornton Harris; and, besides, Harold had his own private hate and grudge to consider—a craving that would not be too easily satisfied. So his intention so far had been to watch over the lawyer's movements, either personally or by proxy, as a cat over a mouse; to find out his places and times of relaxation—if he had any; his confidant—if he had one; or at least the tools that such a man would hardly be



without. Also to take advantage of the election excitement to stir up popular feeling against him—a difficult matter, since he appeared in public as the friend of the popular candidate, and too recent an employer of labour to have been entangled in any trade disputes on his own account.

But Harold's allies had easy access to the class that most readily believes in horrors, and Sam Crofton's murder had been discussed round humble firesides in Colgrave often enough to make everyone glad of a fresh interpretation of the mystery. Only let them throw mud enough, and some of it would be sure to stick; and, though a lingering prejudice in favour of fair-dealing made Harold contradict his friends occasionally when they went considerably beyond what he believed to be the truth, he almost blamed himself for

doing so. Any and every weapon was allowable in such a contest; and it seemed at present that all he could do was to get Harris discredited, if possible, among his new political friends, and in the town, where he had lately established a branch office and might have been desirous to make a connection but for the more brilliant prospects just opened to him in the discovery of coal under his newly-acquired land.

What else in the way of revenge could be accomplished soon, must be left to the stormy chances and stormier passions of the next few days. Harold, as may be judged, was not in the humour to think very coherently or plan very calmly. It pleased him to think that at any moment he might abandon the fine-drawn schemes by which he was attempting to match

subtlety with subtlety, and might make brute force settle the matter ; and, indeed, the longing to do so was by degrees getting the upper hand.

Even with the feeling that Thornton Harris would suffer so much more when defeated point by point and degraded step by step from his present place, it hardly seemed worth while to keep the wehrwolves of revenge hungry for their prey much longer.

So thinking—and by the time his thoughts had reached that point he had, as we may guess, pretty well forgotten Elizabeth Walrond—Harold ceased at last from going to and fro and walking up and down in Colgrave, and came to a final halt for the night in a certain common lodging-house where he had more than once spent a night before, and where two or three

Hernes—who carefully refrained from recognising him in any way—were already domiciled.

Luckily for himself, Harold had never been one of the ultra-fastidious ones, and was now in too deadly earnest to have emotion or disgust to spare for minor matters.

The material comforts or discomforts round him distracted nothing of his attention, as he leaned back in a dingy corner, slouched his hat over his eyes, and set himself to miss not a syllable of the conversation that was going on in the large crowded room, reeking with tobacco and lamp-smoke and redolent of coarse cookery.

The place was full to overflowing of men on the tramp for work—men who had just been taken on and had had as yet no time to make further arrangements—men who

hoped to be taken on soon—and some who toiled not any more than they spun, but drifted wherever the eddy of any excitement took them, and existed in some mysterious manner which they only understood.

One and all were eager to tell or hear some new thing, discussing the chances of the election and the characters of those principally concerned, even more hotly than their own chances of work and wages. And through the buzz Harold could hear his gipsy friends industriously undermining Thornton Harris's reputation and that of the candidate whom he supported, with whispers and hints, and tales half-told, and suggestions of a vast amount of knowledge kept in the background.

It did not take much to stir up the minds of the present company into lively condem-

nation of a lawyer. The leaven was soon working well, and the interchange of confused information going on briskly, when an almost imperceptible sign drew one of the Hernes to Harold's side.

They greeted each other as strangers, and began to talk as if about nothing in particular, but before long the other was sliding into Harold's ear a full account of his day's proceedings—of inquiries that had elicited little to their purpose, and watching that had led to nothing, and of a meeting with Coulson and a message from him that he 'had not been able as yet to do anything.'

It had been the same ever since Harold left Alston Crucis and took to his present conspirator-like mode of existence; and he was growing tired of it even before his auxiliaries, though it meant so much more to him than to them.

If he had been in reality what he seemed to be, he might have gone contentedly blundering on through tortuous ways, like a child whose ignorant hands go wandering about some huge machine, experimentally touching a spring here and a handle there, till at last perhaps one fateful touch sets the whole vast bulk in motion.

But Harold was in the position of knowing just enough about the machine to be aware of the unlikelihood of its being set to work in that fashion. His education and experience just gave him advantage enough over his allies to show him that he and they were working in the dark, and might go on in that way for twenty years without finding out what they wanted, even if it was there to be found.

The question was, Should he be content to go on for years, using his relations' help

till they grew weary of giving it, and then working on alone, following up every clue and watching every chance, and taking at last—if fortune favoured him—a sober and complete revenge, within the limit of the law?

Or should he take advantage of the disturbed state of the little town during the next two days, touch off the gunpowder that his recent Guy Fawkes proceedings had collected in the form of popular excitement, raise a riot that should give the police and the opposing party plenty to distract their attention, and, in the midst of the *mêlée*, meet Thornton Harris face to face and—see what would come of it?

There were two considerations which made the time of the election seem a special opportunity, such as could hardly occur



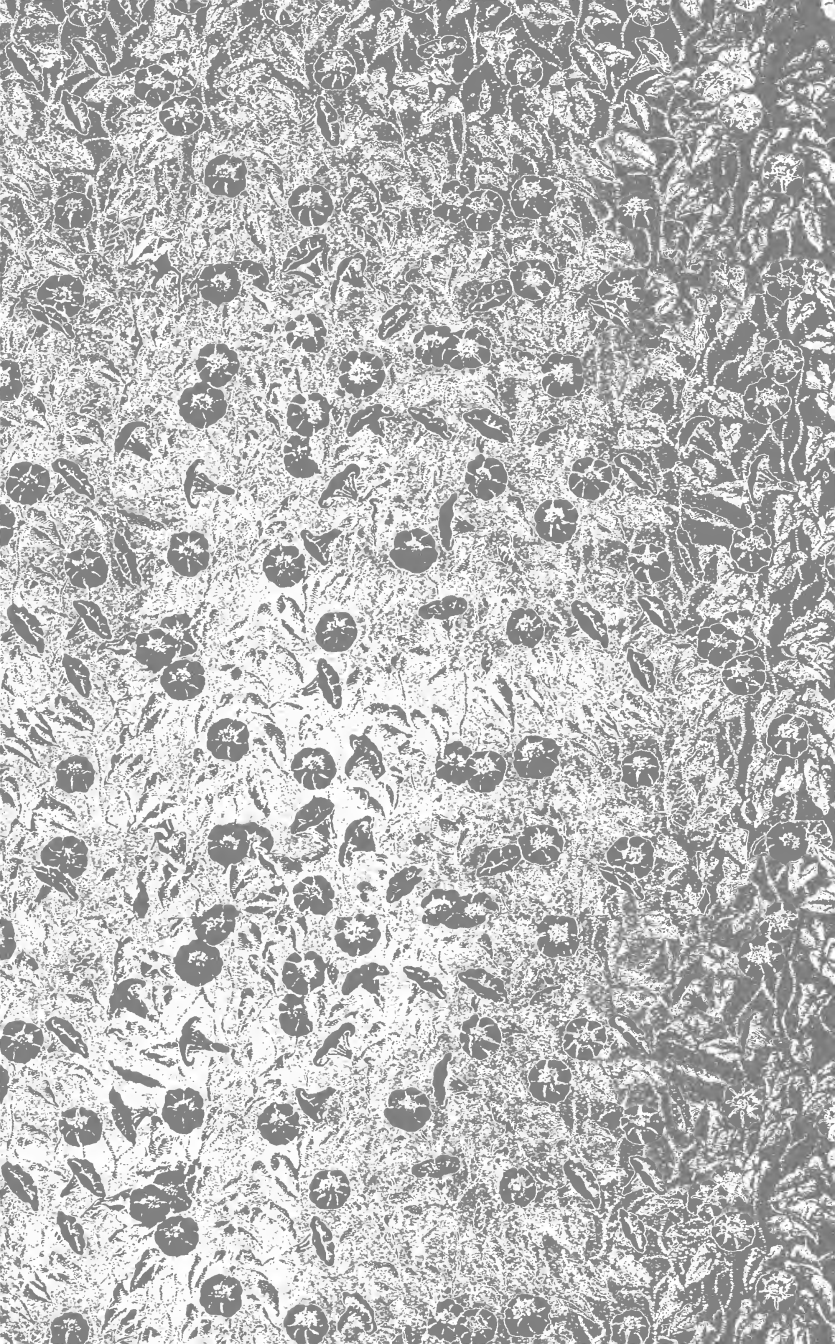
again. In the first place, the general confusion would distract attention and facilitate escape. And in the second place, Harold had resolved that whatever he attempted against his enemy should be done in *public*, no matter at what additional risk to himself. To meet the man in secret, even in fair fight, seemed to savour too much of his own methods, and Harold had his own notions of honour, however faulty the world might consider them.

‘I would take no advantage of him,’ he said to himself, with a quick exultant throb of all his pulses. ‘If he has no weapon I will have none. But I will give him no advantage over me; and his friends shall have too much to do to interfere. A fair field and no favour, such as they would have given us in the good old days, that’s all I want;—and I will have it, if I turn the

town upside down to get it! When once I get my hand on his throat, he shall confess or die—perhaps confess *and* die, unless he does it with the better grace.'

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.







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